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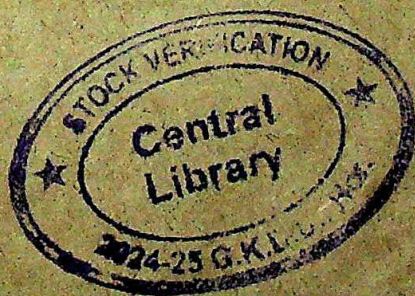
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HAMLET STUDIES

*An International Journal of Research
on*



THE TRAGEDIE OF HAMLET, Prince of Denmarke.

Vol. 4

Summer and Winter 1982

Nos. 1 and 2

JEAN MACINTYRE

Hamlet and the Comic Heroine

SANFORD STERNLICHT

Hamlet—the Actor as Prince

CLIFFORD J. RONAN

*Homo Multiplex and the “Man”
Equivocation in Hamlet*

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*Hamlet and Oedipus Today:
Jones and Lacan*

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Hamlet as Fool

Notes, Production Reports, and Reviews by

WARREN W. WOODEN, ROBERT F. WILLSON, JR., J.J.M. TOBIN, VESNA
PISTOTNIK, BERNICE W. KLIMAN, GORDON ROSS SMITH, W. HUTCHINGS,
CHARLES R. FORKER, R.W. DESAI



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Hamlet Studies, the first journal devoted exclusively to a single literary work, publishes articles, notes, book reviews, reports on significant stage productions, and a digest of articles on *Hamlet* in other journals. It will also feature a critical forum for the views and comments of its readers.

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Comments and Announcements

Hamlet Studies is being posted with such dexterity to its incensed readers in order to allay their fears of receiving the kind of cavalier treatment that Churchill accused Dr. Johnson of meting out to those who had subscribed to his proposed edition of Shakespeare:

He for subscribers bates his hook,
And takes your cash; but where's the book?

With the appearance of the present combined volume the journal is now one year behind schedule, and we hope to maintain the momentum with the publication of Volume 5 (1983) in summer 1984, and Volume 6 (1984) in winter 1984.

A number of subscribers have complained about earlier issues never having been received. Under the old publishing arrangement such lapses were frequent and, apart from expressing regret and urging the publisher to send replacement copies, we had no way of ensuring that this was indeed being done. But now the position has changed. We have recently purchased from the previous publisher several sets of back issues and will be glad to send the missing numbers, without any charge, to subscribers who let us know where there are gaps in their *HSt* collections. Our apologies to all such for the inconvenience.

Professor Marvin Rosenberg, who edits the section "Hamlet in the Theatre" for *HSt*, writes: "I shall be grateful if any scholars from India or elsewhere can give me information on the staging of *Hamlet* in India from the earliest times to the present. All such help rendered will be duly acknowledged." His address: Department of Drama, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720, U.S.A.

All issues of *HSt* are indexed in the *MLA International Bibliography* as well as in the Annotated World Shakespeare Bibliography published each year in *Shakespeare Quarterly*.

Hamlet and the Comic Heroine

JEAN MACINTYRE

This paper is an attempt to consider *Hamlet* outside the context of "Four Great Tragedies" and to observe its other relationships, as Tillyard did in *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*, especially to see the play and its title character not in terms of what came after but in terms of what came before.¹ While this has been done before, the inquiries into Hamlet's forebears in earlier plays have been limited by an unconscious assumption about dramatic characters and biological sex, probably resulting from the fact that for audiences since the Restoration the performer of a male part is usually male and of a female part usually female; when this is not so (as in the "trousers roles" of opera and pantomime or in the donning of women's clothes by a man as in *Charley's Aunt*) the transvestism is obvious and demands audience awareness that the player's sex and the player's role are meant to clash. We forget that for Shakespeare the sex of characters played exclusively by males was an accident of age—boys playing boys and young women, men playing men and old women—and was more a

¹This paper was first delivered to the Pacific Northwest Renaissance Conference at the University of Oregon in March 1973 under the title "Hamlet as Comic Heroine." At that time I was not satisfied with the conclusions I drew about the connection between the comic heroines and *Hamlet*, but since then there has been some helpful work along this line by Anthony B. Dawson in *Indirections: Shakespeare and the Art of Illusion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), esp. Chapter 2, pp. 44-51, and by Susan Snyder, *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), Ch. 3. Professor Snyder starts from different premises and arrives at different conclusions than I do: she sees *Hamlet* as a tragedy complicated by comic shifts from alazon to eiron and by the presence of fundamentally comic characters (Polonius, Osric, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the gravediggers) and comic modes of dialogue. Professor Dawson makes many observations similar to mine about such comic heroines as Portia and Rosalind and their relation to Hamlet, but sees the comic-tragic relationship as the process of Shakespeare's disillusionment with the player's art and the rhetoric of politics, which remains unresolved until the remote pastoralism of *The Tempest*. He also observes that the intellectual interest and the comparative lack of emotional commitment *Hamlet* elicits from audiences comes from what it shares with the comedies. He believes *Hamlet* the conclusion of a process, while I view it as an experiment in a new form. Unlike Dawson, Snyder (p. 91) denies to *Hamlet* comic form, as she does not consider the possible resemblance between him and characters of the other sex.

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matter of costume than of anything else. Thus our habit of seeing Hamlet forecast, however unsatisfactorily, in such dissimilar male roles as Brutus and Prince Hal comes partly from our inclination to see the sex of the role as part of its essence, and to let this override real similarities of character shape between Hamlet and comic heroines.

Hamlet's similarity to comic heroines probably grows out of the way in which Shakespeare developed his solutions to problems of dramatic focus. In most of the histories and early comedies there is no single dominant character; instead there are social groups ranged behind a leader according to rank, and the conflicts among these groups form the plot. This group-focus often means that in these plays there is not much strong individuation of characters, as with the lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the minor lords and ladies of *Love's Labour's Lost*, or most of the nobles and commons in the history plays. While at times a distinctive character emerges from the group, like Berowne or Rosaline, such a character is never dissociated from the group he started with. This kind of dramatic structure seems to have developed from Shakespeare's earliest conception of the history play as a tale of warring factions, which then spilled over into comedy, and although such a structure may toss up a memorable character, such as Berowne, Puck, the Bastard Faulconbridge, Hotspur, or Falstaff, this character is not the centre of the action as is the tragic hero of Shakespeare's maturity.

In his early tragedies (leaving out such tragic histories as *Richard III* and *Richard II*), Shakespeare does not really create a "tragic hero" upon whom interest and sympathy may focus. The dual tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* and the solo tragedy of *Titus Andronicus* are both overendowed with distracting side-issues, while *Julius Caesar* kills its titular hero in Act III, leaving to subsequent critics the argument over whether he, his chief murderer, or his chief avenger is "the hero" of the play. But at the same time as Shakespeare was overwhelmed by the primacy of the group in history and tragedy, he was developing a solution to this problem in romantic comedy, where the heroine emerges as the character dominant over all the multiple plots, and the chief manipulator of their actions and the focus of audience sympathies.

Though there are differences from play to play, we may characterize the pattern of action in Shakespeare's heroine-centered comedies as an initial difficulty, a disguise assumed to evade and/or resolve the difficulty, and the use of wit to manipulate events from inside the disguise so as to achieve the happy end. The heroines who work in this pattern all possess wit, displayed in skill with both logic and words and in resourceful independent action. Though other characters may think themselves clever, they are regularly outwitted by the heroine who has the advantage of knowing

at least one thing, her own disguise, which is concealed from the other characters. Sometimes she has another advantage in a confidante who knows her secret and who usually is disguised as well. The heroines in all cases but one disguise themselves as men, and by the entry this gives them into masculine preserves of action and power they arrange the outcome of events not only for themselves but also for most of the other characters. The result is general happiness: separated families are reunited, separated lovers betrothed, intrusive and troublesome persons like Shylock and Malvolio checked and punished, and the characters resume their proper social roles and exit dancing and singing to feasts and marriages.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona gives the difficulty, the disguise, and a greater share of wit than the other characters have to Julia, usually regarded as a sub-plot character. Although she takes the initiative to end her separation from Proteus, making Lucetta her confidante, and although she seems to plan some intervention in his courtship of Silvia, the plot of the play gives her nothing to do about his infidelity, since Silvia rejects Proteus out of disgust at his perfidy and love for Valentine. When Valentine offers Silvia to Proteus, Julia faints, and quickly fabricates an explanation about a ring, but it is not clear whether she wittily means to identify herself by showing the ring Proteus once gave her. She berates Proteus for inconstancy and regains his love, but everything happens so quickly that the effect is unconvincing. The ingredients of the comic heroine are all present, but Shakespeare has not yet discovered what may be done with them.

In *The Merchant of Venice* the pattern shapes only the second half of the play, whose first half centres on Bassanio's solution of the casket riddle. This fulfils the terms of the Lord of Belmont's will, and frees Portia from its compulsions by marrying her to the man she would have chosen on her own. The difficulty that prompts her disguise and her show of wit is therefore only hers at a distance; Antonio is Bassanio's friend and has supplied the means for Bassanio to come and win her by incurring a debt to Shylock and the risk of repayment with the pound of flesh. Disguised as the young lawyer Balthasar and accompanied by her confidante disguised as his clerk, Portia outwits Shylock in words and logic, punishes him in his pride and his purse, dowers Jessica, and restores Antonio's fortune. Her disguise turns the tables on her dead father, since from being controlled she becomes the controller. It also enables her and Nerissa to beg their bridegrooms' rings as a test of their faith, and later to teach them a lesson in promise-keeping. The men acknowledge the wit of their wives, and Gratiano's exit line suggests that they have learned the lesson. Although the pattern of the comic heroine's adventures is abbreviated, it develops from Portia's important if different function in the first part of

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the play, where her wit is displayed in every scene so that her success in Venice is by no means surprising, and this is then related to her own marriage happiness by the ring trick, which is developed much more than the ring device in *Two Gentlemen* and thus does not seem perfunctory, although it is often declared to be irrelevant.²

Much Ado About Nothing in some ways reverts to the social groups of earlier comedies. Difficulty belongs to one heroine, wit to another, disguise is perfunctory and barely functional, and the deceptions originate with Don Pedro and Don John's manservant, not with either heroine. Although Beatrice's wit makes her the logical solver of Hero's difficulty, the function goes instead to the "substantial watch . . . with mistaking of words"³ who provide the play's low comedy. What this play contributes to the subsequent romantic comedies and to *Hamlet* is the perfecting of wit as a weapon of offense and defense. It also develops characters who can become the victims of wit without being made either pathetic or ridiculous to the audience. This growth of complexity makes possible a Rosalind who can control the whole play and yet be laughed at, a Viola who can retain sympathy though victim of a practical joke, and a Hamlet who can manipulate everything brilliantly and fail, yet remain a hero.

Unlike Portia, Rosalind and Viola are their own mistresses from the beginning, and must disguise themselves and assume responsibility before the first act is over. Both must make their way in a strange country and a social rank not their own. Both love men who are aware only of their masculine disguise, and have to cope with feminine emotions while keeping the disguise convincing. Both also have to look after others, for whom they feel responsible, and they have to remain alert for the chance to resume their rightful selves at the right time.

²Dawson has noticed many of the same things about Portia's role vis-a-vis her father's will and the ring plot (*Indirections*, pp. 9-19), but I do not agree with his view of her dealings with Shylock, or of his idea that Venice is a coldly commercial environment. What seems to be happening in *The Merchant* is a process of converting the group-centred plot of the older comedies (Venice and the Venetian men) to the heroine-centred plots of the mature comedies. The heroine takes over at the end of Act III, but the play is still saddled with its six not very differentiated men (Bassanio, Gratiano, Lorenzo, Antonio and their fainter echoes Solanio and Salerino), and with their single opponent Shylock. Portia and Shylock, who stand alone, thus come to be perceived as antagonists in a way that group comedy is not strong enough to contain, and so they produce an inappropriate and probably inadvertent feeling that this is almost a tragedy of "mighty opposites" that is imperfectly resolved because incapable of comic resolution. It also produces the various loose ends, such as Jessica's dowry and Antonio's ships returning home, to be untidily bundled away.

³Ben Jonson, *Bartholmew Fayre*, in *Works*, Vol. VI, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford: The University Press, 1938), Induction, 43-4.

For Rosalind, the difficulty begins when she falls in love with Orlando and right afterward is banished from her uncle's court. Her disguise as Ganymede is to enable her to protect herself and Celia until they reach her father in Arden, but once in Arden, even after she has met her father, she does not abandon the disguise but keeps it up as zestfully as she assumed it. She can do this the better because her disguise does not isolate her, since both the disguised Celia and the undisguised Touchstone know who she is. The swain and shepherdess roles, assumed to ensure safety, then permit both princesses to test their lovers. When "Ganymede" ridicules him, Orlando proves that he loves Rosalind by his response to the mockery. "I take some joy to say you are [my Rosalind], because I would be talking of her" (4.1. 89-93)⁴ and later, "I can live no longer by thinking" (5.2. 50). Haughty, covetous Oliver proves that his reformation is real by choosing to renounce his inheritance and marry, as he thinks, a poor, sunburnt, lowborn country girl. Rosalind is also tested by Celia's teasing, by Phebe's embarrassing pursuit, and by Orlando's assumption that the wooing is nothing but a game. When Rosalind tires of playing she has the personal authority to make everyone else accept her judgment about their marriages. Since almost everything that happens after her banishment arises from her will, she can at last choose to drop her disguise, knowing that she has arranged everything for success beforehand.

Rosalind's masterly playing with her world contrasts greatly with Viola's lonely assumption of an unwanted responsibility. Rosalind chooses almost everything that befalls her. Viola almost always has to accept second best. Her difficulty comes when shipwreck parts her from her brother and for all she knows has drowned him. The difficulty then increases when her intention to enter Olivia's household proves impossible to carry out. The disguise as a singing boy she then adopts brings her further trouble, for she falls in love with her new master, Duke Orsino, only to learn that she must carry love messages to Olivia and force her way somehow into a house she was not able to enter as a woman. She has no Nerissa or Celia to be her confidante, and when Orsino urges her to confide in him she has to fabricate the story of a sister's unhappy love, since she can hardly tell him the truth. Furthermore, although even the fastidious Clown acknowledges her wit and discretion, these good qualities seem to give her no help out of either the difficulty that has led to the disguise or the difficulty the disguise has led to; she has too much

⁴Quotations from Shakespeare are from the Riverside edition, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et. al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1975).

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sympathy with unrequited love to treat Olivia's importunities as Rosalind treated Phebe's. Though she is not being manipulated like Hero or Beatrice, she is trapped into fighting what she believes a real duel with Sir Andrew, which she fears will prove to all "how much I do lack of a man" (3.4. 303). She cannot foresee a chance to reveal herself, and can only hope that time will eventually untangle her difficulties, as of course it does when Sebastian is mistaken for her and resolves everything by marrying Olivia and revealing that he has a sister called Viola, the first time her name is pronounced in the play. Her release comes by chance, not choice, while Orsino's declaration of love sounds almost conditional on his liking her looks in "maid's garments" (5.1.275).

Like the comic heroines, Hamlet is handed a difficulty, to avenge his father's murder. Once he undertakes to do so, he bethinks himself of a form of disguise for his emotions if not for his person, the famous and problematic "antic disposition."⁵ By his wit he manipulates persons and events, especially in his scenes with Polonius and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in the play scene, in the closet scene, and during the offstage events of the voyage to England. He outmanoeuvres his opponents in both logic and words. He is independent and resourceful in action. Finally, he succeeds in resolving his difficulty, although multiple deaths, not multiple marriages, mark his success, and one of the deaths is his own. Almost everything that happens in the play either starts from him or results from response to his actions, and the sympathy of the audience remains with him no matter how repellent some of the things he does. Both Hamlet's centrality to all events and his retention of audience sympathy in spite of what he does appear in this play for the first time in a tragedy by Shakespeare.

Hamlet, furthermore, has absorbed much of its substance from the comic tradition, not the tragic. Many of its characters come from the stock cast of Terentian comedy—Polonius the senex, Laertes the young adventurer, Ophelia the ingenue, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the parasites, Osric the fop (with a spice of braggart soldier), and even the gravediggers as clownish servants. No other tragedy of Shakespeare includes such a roster of comic characters, and no other is so full of jesting.⁶ Like most of the comic heroines, Hamlet has a confidant, his university friend Horatio. No subsequent tragic hero has an intelligent and trustworthy social equal to share his concerns with; Horatio's presence means that Hamlet's sufferings are not exacerbated by his isolation, as are those of

⁵Dawson also recognizes the antic disposition as disguise, and the disguise by its nature as ineffectual. *Indirections*, p. 44.

⁶*The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies*, pp. 107-118.

Othello, Macbeth, Lear, Timon, Coriolanus, and even Antony.⁷

One of Shakespeare's main problems with *Hamlet*, which may have contributed to his use of comic techniques to dramatize Belleforest and Saxo, was that the story was all-too-familiar to playgoers as a venerable Senecan revenge play. Nashe's gibe, "English Seneca read by candle-light may afford you whole Hamlets—I mean Handfuls—of tragical speeches," indicates that even in 1589 the play struck some as ridiculous, and it must have been proverbially absurd by the time Lodge (in 1596) alluded to "the ghost that cried so pitifully at the Theatre, . . . Hamlet, revenge!"⁸ In 1597 Henslowe's revised version of the popular *Spanish Tragedy* was a great success, so that a competing revenge play might have seemed a good idea for the Chamberlain's Men. (Perhaps the success of *Hamlet* in turn provoked the extant additions to *The Spanish Tragedy*, which date from 1601.) In *Hamlet* they had such a play already in stock. It needed only to be brought up-to-date by their successful house playwright, but required more than new additions to overcome its out-of-date excesses. At the time, Shakespeare had been writing successful romantic comedies centred on a heroine, and since wit, disguise, and ironic comedy (including a play within a play) occurred in *The Spanish Tragedy*, he may have thought he could outdo that play by remodeling the "Hamlet" play according to his own successful comic pattern. Furthermore, to adapt his comic pattern to tragic matter gave him a technique for concentrating everything on one central figure, and also gave him a means to get rid of the revenge play's excesses and focus upon its subtle emotional dilemmas. In any case, the role of avenger seems to have struck Shakespeare as inherently comic. Shylock, Don John, Oliver, Duke Frederick, and Malvolio are all charac-

⁷Horatio as confidant may have come as a second conception of the role's possibilities. Hamlet swears both him and Marcellus to secrecy, including the promise not to ask questions, and it may be that Horatio was meant to fade away after this as Marcellus does. But in the second scene of Act III Horatio is said to have heard the whole story and now is to be Hamlet's second opinion on the King's guilt (which Snyder observes is never positively stated, *Comic Matrix*, pp. 100-101). This change creates the minor critical problem of when Hamlet has told Horatio all; perhaps it is a symptom of Shakespeare's perception that Hamlet was turning out very like Portia and Rosalind, and like them would benefit by having someone to confide in.

⁸In Dekker's *Satiromastix*, published in 1601 and clearly part of the "throwing about of brains" Guildenstern refers to (*Hamlet*, 2.2 358-9), the braggart Tucca denies his own name and announces to Horace (who has distributed anonymous libels upon him) "my name's Hamlet reuenge" (*Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, Vol. I, ed. Fredson Bowers [Cambridge: The University Press, 1953], 4.1. 121). While Dekker's play mocks quite a few plays of the Chamberlain's Men, including (probably) the duel scene of *Twelfth Night*, this is probably not a gibe at Shakespeare's *Hamlet* but a repetition of the familiar old jokes at the earlier play.

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ters with a grievance in search of revenge, and they all become the butts of comic punishment; the more extreme the vengefulness, the more complete the deflation. Thus the revenge subject may have also prompted Shakespeare's use of comic form.

Compared with what happens in the comedies, of course, Hamlet's difficulty and how he tries to resolve it are of another order of magnitude. The task the ghost sets him is far more demanding and serious than the problems which put Julia, Portia, Rosalind, and Viola into masculine dress. His disguise is not so obvious as their changes from lady to gentleman; his confidant, Horatio, is more of an observer; his wit is often bitter and futile; and the solution comes about by the manipulations of others, which for him means chance, not choice. Nonetheless the pattern is there, giving shape to Shakespeare's first play with an unrivaled single hero as its focus.

Hamlet's difficulty, obviously, is to avenge his father's death upon the man in power, the dead king's brother Claudius, who has succeeded to the throne by what, but for a ghost, would be the perfect crime, and who has just strengthened his position by marrying the queen dowager. Claudius has also stopped likely cause of rebellion by naming Hamlet his heir, and denied opportunity for rebellion by keeping Hamlet at court under his eye. Like the heroines, but sooner, Hamlet discovers that his problem expands beyond its apparent initial limit, an opportunity to kill Claudius, taking in such questions as the veracity and nature of the ghost, the king's degree of guilt, the possible complicity of others (including his mother and the girl he loves), and indeed the trustworthiness of everybody, including the soldiers and the old friend who summon him to meet the ghost and hear its story. Soon the difficulty expands even further as some of the methods the heroines use so successfully arouse suspicions in the counselor Polonius and then in the King, and bring spies in the persons of his former schoolfellows Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Attempts to verify the ghost's story by independent means only serve to alarm the King, and with the death of Polonius behind the Queen's arras the possibility of effective action seems to disappear.

Hamlet faced with difficulty resorts not to one disguise but to a series of disguises under the general heading "antic disposition." The convention of comic disguise as Shakespeare uses it does not afford his men (except Falstaff in *Merry Wives*) the change of sex by clothing available to his women. Men who go into disguise may change social class and social role, like Kent in *King Lear* and the Duke in *Measure for Measure*. Among strangers they may simply give a false name, like Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*. They may mask, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*, although this serves only for brief

concealment in one special situation. They may also play the fool, like Hieronymo, Malevole in *The Malcontent*, or Edgar in *King Lear*, and probably Hamlet's "antic disposition," which was in the sources in any case, is one variant of this recourse. It includes behavior which if not quite certifiable insanity is unlike the Hamlet people used to know. With Ophelia he plays the distraught lover according to Rosalind's description, which persuades the shallow Polonius that he has gone mad from frustrated love. To Rosencrantz and Guildenstern he shows and describes symptoms from standard works on melancholy, and hints that ambition lies behind them (3.2. 340-44). After he kills Polonius, his talk begins to sound like active lunacy and perhaps he runs ("Hide fox and all after!" 4.2. 30-31), like Lear when mad, from the courtiers trying to seize him. After his grapple with Laertes at Ophelia's funeral, he affects recovery from a half-remembered dementia, and asks Laertes to forgive his present sane self for the harm done by his former madness. This apology may confirm to an audience what the inconsistencies of earlier behavior have already implied, that the "madness" was as feigned as the sex of Portia or Rosalind.⁹

Hamlet's wit shares the variety and flexible adaptiveness of the wit of the comic heroines. In scenes with the Terentian figures, especially Polonius, it is satirical. He baits the old counselor as Rosalind baits Jaques or Portia baits Shylock, attacking with laughter characters already unsympathetic or absurd to the audience. But where the heroines deflate and defeat their victims, Hamlet only convinces the old man that he is mad and needs to be openly humored and secretly spied on. With Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, at the beginning, his manner is like Portia's with Nerissa—somewhat naughty joking with gentlemen-in-waiting—but once he realizes that they are not prospective confidants but spies he turns on them savagely enough to make Rosencrantz protest "My lord, you once did love me" (3.2. 335), with similar exclamations from both in their later scenes with him. His behavior with the grave-diggers, the courtesy of the great to clowns, is rather like the jesting of comic gentlefolk with the fools of their plays—Rosalind and Celia with Corin or Touchstone and Touchstone's parody of the manner with William, Jessica with Launcelot Gobbo, Olivia with Feste, or, for that matter, Lear with his Fool, or Ross and Lennox with the Porter. The lightest play of Hamlet's wit comes at the brink of catastrophe, when he and Horatio bait the "waterfly" Osric, yet it may be that Osric's very absurdity deadens Hamlet's perception of danger in a duel with a man

⁹*Indirections*, p. 44

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whom he has wronged, to be fought under the aegis and eye of his known and treacherous enemy, the King.

Yet all this comic paraphernalia is ironic, for in *Hamlet* the devices and qualities which make the heroines successful in the comedies only contribute to and accentuate Hamlet's failure. The reason for this grows out of the change from comic to tragic concerns. In tragedy what is in question is not a desirable way of life defeating a way of life less desirable (cakes, ale, and true love defeating killjoys and self-seekers), but something inherent in a sympathetic character which joins with outward circumstance to kill him. Simply, the comic character survives the story, is happier than when it started, and has some responsibility for his or her success, which carries others along. The tragic character does not survive, suffers on his way to death, and has much responsibility for his disaster, which brings others down as he falls. The more control over events the tragic character has or seems to have, the more responsible he seems for the evil that befalls him, even though it is difficult to identify this "tragic flaw" in Hamlet. Hamlet should be capable of resolving his difficulty, given the extent of his wit, yet this same wit spins difficulties when the way is clear, as in the King's prayer scene; it leads him to irrelevancies, as in the Closet Scene; and at last its success on the ship seems to produce the hubris evident in Hamlet's open return to Denmark and his dealings with Laertes in the graveyard, as well as in his mistaken trust of Laertes' honor when the duel is arranged. He himself recognizes the irrelevance of wit to deed in repeated soliloquies, but seems compelled to follow its leadings in what is, after all, a straightforward job of catching King Claudius at a vulnerable moment without rousing his suspicions, and proclaiming his crime while striking him down.

Hamlet's wit leads to the assumption of an ineffectual disguise, to a test for the king's guilt which reveals his suspicions to the king, to efforts to make Gertrude and even Ophelia feel guilty for all-but-involuntary participation in the King's crime, and to a constant observation by spies behind curtains. When Hamlet kills one of these spies, Polonius, thinking that the spy is the King, he enables Claudius to ship him to England. Wit and luck combine on the journey to reveal the plot against his life and to get him onto the pirate ship when the voyage is still young. But Hamlet does not take his opportunity to disguise himself as the sailor bearing the letter, which would have been his best chance to kill the King. Instead he challenges first the King and then Laertes to deal with him, and their taking up the challenge, with straightforward combat masking treachery doubled, brings down the last of Polonius's house and the Danish royal family, and hands over the kingdom to the Norwegian prince, the hereditary national enemy. The means resemble those of comic heroines; the

outcome differs ironically from the success those means have given.

Yet the use of comic heroines as models for Hamlet and their careers as paradigms for his does make *Hamlet* a different sort of tragedy from its successors. Though Claudius wins some of the skirmishes, seizes control from Hamlet when the death of Polonius and its attribution to madness makes an excuse for exiling the Prince, and at last makes Laertes the tool of Hamlet's death, he never breaks Hamlet as their antagonists break Othello, Lear, Macbeth, and Antony. Claudius's evil is evil on a human scale, and can be met without overturning the order of the world. Hamlet does not have to contend with the cosmos, only with other men; his death does not change the world, but only alters its management. The limited antagonist and the less than cataclysmic ending are closer to comedy than to later tragedy. A comparison with the death of Antony, which also goes with a transfer of power to a different sort of man, shows how human in scale is the end of *Hamlet*. When Antony dies "The crown o'th'earth doth melt" (4.15.63) and Caesar, marvelling at what does *not* accompany it, verbally creates these accompaniments:

The breaking of so great a thing should make
A greater crack. The round world
Should have shook lions into civil streets
And citizens to their dens. The death of Antony
Is not a single doom, in the name lay
A moi'ty of the world.

(5.1.14-19)

Hamlet's death remains single, personal, and human:

Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

(5.2.359-60)

In *Hamlet* emotion never sweeps all before it. Whenever it grows high, someone intervenes to restore balance—Horatio and Marcellus summon Hamlet when his mind is reeling from the Ghost's disclosures, Polonius and the Ghost break up the emotional violence of the Closet Scene, King and court separate Hamlet and Laertes at Ophelia's grave, Osric punctiliously referees the fatal duel and parts Hamlet and Laertes when they wound each other because "they are incens'd" (5.2.302). A sense of personal decorum limits emotional outbursts in the most vehement soliloquies. Even the Closet scene ends with reasoned exhortation and cool-headed action, including a joke about the dead Polonius. Such restraint

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by social and personal control is the stated justification for comedy in Renaissance literary theory. No other of Shakespeare's mature tragedies shares this kind of reasoned decorum.

Also, Hamlet and most of the other characters are self-aware; even the most obtuse, Polonius, Gertrude, Ophelia, and Laertes, show some ability to think of themselves from outside and to govern their behavior if not their thinking. One cannot imagine anyone saying of Hamlet as Regan says of Lear, "he hath ever slenderly known himself" (1.1.293-4), or manipulating Hamlet through his emotions as Iago does Othello or Lady Macbeth her husband. *Hamlet* is top-heavy with self-examination, so much so that Hamlet defines his flaw as "thinking too precisely on th' event" (4.4.41), while since Coleridge critics have particularized the flaw as excessive self-awareness limiting capacity to act. This is an odd sort of *tragic* flaw, running contrary as it does to Renaissance counsels to self-knowledge as the root of virtue, and to the success of Shakespeare's comic heroines, who all excel in self-knowledge. Perhaps Shakespeare in *Hamlet* was repeating his explorations of wit's limitations in *Love's Labour's Lost*, where it is made to confront death and human weakness and admit that "to move wild laughter in the throat of death . . . cannot be, it is impossible" (5.2.855-6). A similar limit on wit as detector of villainy and as preventer of love and happiness appears in *Much Ado*, although much lightened, where self-knowledge comes from being tricked, and the truth from the errors of fools. The experiment of *Hamlet* appears to have proved to Shakespeare that the comic model caused unforeseen difficulties in tragedy. In the tragedies that come after, the intellectual qualities of the comic heroine and of Hamlet are bestowed on villains and opponents—on Edmund, Iago, and Octavius Caesar—not on the unreflective, driven, passionate heroes.

Nonetheless *Hamlet* is the play which made these later passionate tragedies possible, for it is the first tragedy of Shakespeare's career with a single hero upon whom all events centre and who engages emotional commitment from the audience for himself without significant rivalry from others. If the emotional commitment is somewhat distant and impersonal, an intellectual feeling rather than an absorbing passion, this is the kind of effect produced by the romantic comedies with their focal heroines. The dark comedies (whatever their temporal relationship to *Hamlet*) gave opportunity to study the passionate character in Helena, Troilus, and Claudio, who are tried by rejection, betrayal, and the fear of death and whose emotions increasingly dominate as *Troilus* follows *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* follows *Troilus*. While the characters of passion in these plays increasingly command our sympathies, the heroines become less and less effectual and witty, as well as less capable of engaging audience

sympathy. Helena arouses some hostility, and keeps what sympathy she has in part because her bridegroom so plainly chooses to be a cad. If Shakespeare meant Helena to win sympathy with imperfect success, he clearly meant Cressida to lose it by the play's end. She is the first more-or-less comic heroine not to go into disguise or to govern her life, and her wit leans in the direction of the off-color joke. Isabella is not a wit at all, never puts on a disguise, loses the sympathy she begins with when she prefers her chastity to her brother and roundly condemns him when he shows that he fears to die, and relies entirely on the disguised Duke for the devices that save everything.

The shift from the central heroine in control of herself and her world to the central hero who loses control of everything and so dies is accompanied by difficulties in uniting dramatic focus with audience sympathy. The problem resolves itself only in *Othello*.

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Hamlet—the Actor as Prince

SANFORD STERNLICHT

The first major difficulty in discussing Hamlet, Man and Actor is the psychological complexity of the man whom I shall call the "natural actor" i.e. one who communicates with others not by direct articulation of either truth or falsehood, but by indirect reflecting of every thought and emotion through one of a wide range of enunciation, intonation and gesture patterns that are calculated to achieve a desired effect and evoke a desired reaction.

Students of the theatre consider every person a "natural actor" and believe that the element of "acting" in ordinary behavior and communication is a matter of degree rather than kind. My difficulty of finding proper terminology to describe the type I have in mind might best be solved by the German term "Schauspiel-Mensch" which may best be translated as "essential actor," a phrase I shall use interchangeably with "natural actor."

The "natural actor" may, of course, not always be aware of this processing or reflecting of thought and emotion. The unconscious habit in many sensitive and intelligent persons of "acting a part" heightens the complexity of the "natural actor" in general and I think of Hamlet in particular, since frequently man and actor become indeed indistinguishable, but there are also occasions when the "natural actor" will please himself in deliberate and studied pose and phrase. If, in addition, the "natural actor" has taken a more than passing interest in the formal art of acting, has taken part in stage performance, or has cultivated the sister-arts of dramatic recitation, rhetoric and body-movement, he will be further impelled to mirror his every mood and sensation through the polished reflecting glass of histrionics.

It is my claim that Hamlet was just such a "natural actor" who strove to express his complex, manifold personality by acting out various parts corresponding to his shifting moods and alternating character facets. Again, this innate and, to an extent, psychologically motivated acting was supplemented in Hamlet by an active interest in the art of acting (as is demonstrated by his speech to the players) and quite possibly by careful training in dramatics, certainly in rhetoric, that he must have received at the university at Wittenberg. Finally, we must never lose sight of the fact that Hamlet, the character, was the product of a playwright who, while he

was writing, was busily engaged in the profession of acting. Since, by almost universal critical consent, Shakespeare must have identified himself more closely with Hamlet than with any other of his characters, it must again appear that the Dane Prince's histrionic nature and achievements are not altogether accidental.

In any case, it seems to me safer to assume that Hamlet reflected Shakespeare's overt passion for the stage than to imply that he reflects Shakespeare's subconscious passion for his mother. With these remarks establishing the basis for my argument, I now propose to examine whatever evidence can be mustered from a detailed analysis of the play. The keyword to Hamlet's first long speech is "seems." The aggrieved son and heir angrily takes his mother up on her "Why seems it so particular with thee?" by retorting that his sense of loss cannot be sufficiently marked by the conventional "inky cloak" and other "suits of woe" worn too briefly, and—by implication—insincerely, by the other members of the family and the court. He appears indeed to "protest too much" that he is not guilty of "actions that a man might play" but that he has that within him "that passes show." This passage lends itself well indeed to interpretations of a Pirandellesque nature since it raises at the very outset of the slow unfolding of Hamlet's character the problem of appearance and reality that is at the very root of the essential concept of *theatre*. A.C. Bradley and a host of others have commented on the appearance-reality theme without, however, tying it in directly with the recognition, nay identification, of Hamlet with the natural actor personality. The natural actor is always on guard lest his genuine feelings may be misinterpreted and mistaken for superficial histrionic show. Indeed, genuinely felt emotion and its expression pose a real problem to the natural actor who is frequently unable himself to steer clear of "all forms, moods [and] shapes of grief" and to recognize "that which passes show."

Thus, in his very first speech Hamlet clearly gives himself away as a man all too familiar with "windy suspiration of forced breath," with trappings, behavior of dejected visage and actions that a man might play. It may of course be argued that the lines referred to, far from revealing Hamlet's own penchant for artifice and show, are to be understood, rather, as his indictment of the falseness and corruption of the court society in which he is so obviously a misfit. But this is precisely why Hamlet's actor nature has so far never been fully understood. If he inveighs so heavily against trappings and suits of woe, why does he himself affect the "inky cloak" and the "veiled lids" so conspicuously? Without any doubt he senses the loss of his father keenly and he is deeply disturbed at his mother's hasty remarriage. Convinced of the shallowness of the court and of the inability of his uncle-father and aunt-mother to

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understand his feelings, he might leave well enough alone and lock up his grief within his own bosom, but demonstrative actor that he is, he must give way to the temptation of heightening his drama, of expressing his grief eloquently, and of wearing the incongruously jarring costume. In the best tradition of the theatre, the inky cloak-costume and the veiled-lid mask will then also evoke a catharsis, and produce an appropriate feeling of guilt in Gertrude.

I shall not at this point attempt to argue whether Hamlet's soliloquies betray a subtler sense of dramatic figures of speech, pretense, and artifice than do the soliloquies of other Shakespearean heroes, notably of Othello, Macbeth, and Lear. It seems at best a tenuous argument to claim that the fervent exclamation, "O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt" is more revealing of an unconscious or even suppressed actor than is the equally fervent declamatory phrase of Othello, "Put out the light." To make such a claim would eventually force us into admitting that all of Shakespeare's characters are actors, or rather, characters to be acted by actors, and at once we would be sucked into the whirlpool of literary-metaphysical futilities that result from a confusion of the fictitious with the actual personality. A somewhat stronger case might be made out for the unusually marked tendency on the part of Hamlet to repeat words, a trick that indicates a very genuine flair for histrionic effects. Thus his repetitions, "thrift, thrift Horatio," or "words, words, words," "except my life, except my life, except my life," are characteristic of Hamlet only and are delivered with a neat sense of their value in affecting his audience, be it Horatio or Polonius.

Bradley has noted what he calls "this peculiarity," but he has failed to make anything of it. He does conclude that this trick of repetition is "a habit" with Hamlet and that he must be much mistaken if this habit is found in any other serious character of Shakespeare's, but he leaves it at that, merely adding that "much more so, and indeed absolutely individual (with Hamlet) are the uses of wordplay in moments of extreme excitement."

As to Hamlet's antic-disposition, of which I shall have more to say later, it does easily appear to be, in this context, actor-personality behavior rather than madness. It might still be argued that "play-acting" often serves as an outlet for the emotionally disturbed who with it cover up their inability to "deed-act" but that merely goes to prove that the entire question of acting (feigned madness) or real madness is as complex as it has seemed to many because its two component parts are so closely related. Thus, the frequent attacks of great excitement to which Hamlet is subjected (scientifically termed "hypo-manic" by Ernest Jones) mark phases of his acting when the medium controls him, e.g. his hysterical chanting

"Why, let the stricken deer go weep," or his impulsive leaping into Ophelia's grave. When Hamlet's excitement does not render him temporarily oblivious of his audience, but when he works for a calculated effect, such as in his first scene with Polonius and in his interview with Gertrude, he controls his medium fully, play-acts carefully, deliberately, and, at the same time, is also saner, less hysterical.

Now that we have made the distinction between Hamlet's conscious and unconscious acting and have seen the close relationship between the problem of madness and the behavior of the actor, we may study the various scenes which Hamlet literally enacts for the benefit of the different characters of the play.

It must be noted first that even before his decision to put on the "antic disposition" Hamlet plays the part of the somber melancholy gentleman in sable suit only to relinquish it temporarily for that of the honest, blunt and jesting fellow student of Horatio. Preceding his encounter with the ghost, Hamlet's acting is somewhat muted, yet it is still apparent enough to differ from "conventional" or expected behavior. In tense expectation of the announced awesome vision, then, he chooses to perform for his companions by treating them to a polite, polished, philosophical discourse on the ignoble custom of royal carousing (it has been aptly pointed out that only several hours earlier in his "fellow-student" act he offered to teach Horatio and Marcellus to "drink deep" ere they depart). He also theorizes on the fateful effects on man's whole nature of the most minute of hereditary taints of character. The discourse may or may not have entertained his listeners. It helped Shakespeare (and incidentally Laurence Olivier) to draw attention to a crucial philosophical aspect of his theme which may or may not have been understood by the groundlings. In any case, it must have satisfied Hamlet's constant urge for self-display and thus have effectively reduced his tenseness and anxiety. When the ghost appears, Hamlet greets the apparition with an excited but choicely articulate cascade of propitiatory formulae. It will be claimed that Hamlet could not now be play-acting—the emotional impact of the vision is much too strong. Yet compare his

My fate cries out,
And makes each petty artery in this body
As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.
Still am I call'd. Unhand me, gentlemen.
By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me

which, in pursuit of the ghost, he flings at the comrades of his watch, with his tame echoing of "Murder!" and his banal exclamation "O, God!"

when he is alone with the ghost, i.e. without an immediate and real audience.

I shall omit the soliloquy, "O all you host of heaven" from my analysis since, as stated above, the soliloquies, in themselves dramatic devices, cannot legitimately be used in constructing a case for the actor personality of a character. Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Macbeth all use them, and differentiation, with one notable exception, would be too delicate and hairsplitting a critical undertaking. Still, this last soliloquy indicates to the audience that Hamlet's entire personality reels from the blow of the ghost's revelation, and for a while Hamlet vacillates between the urgent desire to confide in his friends, i.e. to bolster his failing courage with his fellow-students' moral support, and his immediate intuitive and, as it turns out, stronger urge, to dissemble, act, or put on the only disposition appropriate to the state of his feelings, the weirdness of the ghost's revelation, and the safeguarding of his person, i.e. an antic disposition. From now on Hamlet's behavior turns into a veritably kaleidoscopic and dazzling display of character-part acting. Hamlet clearly has not thought out his part yet; he has only decided to put on a disposition, by himself most fittingly and broadly termed "antic."

We can see that he was on the verge of appealing for sympathy and enlisting confidants with his "But you'll be secret?," abruptly followed by "There's ne'er a villain dwelling in all Denmark." In a modern system of punctuation we should have dashes here or dots, for this is where he suddenly and brusquely shifts strategy—he does not continue: such as my uncle, Claudius; there is to be no frankness, but dissembling, and "anticly" he adds: "but he's an arrant Knave." From then on he has found his cue, and under the impact of the otherworldly messenger's tale, he brilliantly and excitedly plays a whole range, a perfect gamut of "antic" parts:

serious: Never make known what you have seen tonight.

intense: Nay, but swear it.

humorous: Ha, ha, boy, sayst thou so? Art thou there truepenny? . . .
Well said old mole.

melancholy: There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,/Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

roguish: (the mime): That you, at such times seeing me, never shall,
With arms encumbered thus, or this headshake,/Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase as,/"Well, well, we know," or "There be an if they might."

solemn: Rest, rest, perturbed spirit.

dramatic: The time is out of joint. O cursed spite/That ever I was born to set it right.

Note especially Hamlet's actually pantomiming gestures (encumbered arms, headshakes) imitating and caricaturing patterns of speech: "Well, well... there be an if they might..." Who but the natural actor would carry on thus in a situation so fraught with danger and of such personal impact?

We don't encounter Hamlet again until several scenes and months later; he has had time to think out his part and to give it some of his own direction. In the meantime, however, we hear reports of his behavior, and very graphic reports, too. Ophelia, all "affrighted" describes to her father a perfect scene of pantomime, accomplished to the last detail in gesture and costuming, that Hamlet has just performed for her benefit in her room. It would serve no purpose here to expand by further arguments the voluminous controversy as to whether in this particular scene Hamlet acted the man mad with disappointment in love, whether he was thrown into actual frenzy by Ophelia's slights or whether, possibly, a combination of the two motivations explains his behavior truthfully. One thing is certain. Ophelia vividly reports a short and impressive scene during which Hamlet clearly succeeded in impressing her with a silent but eloquent sequence of pantomime gestures, a one-man dumb show, convincingly effective; and quite possibly brilliantly conceived beforehand, and intelligently directed. It is also obvious that the effectiveness of this dumb-show lay in its being reported by word of mouth rather than by being enacted before the audience, a scene which Shakespeare could have arranged by simply activating the alcove stage. Could such a mutely eloquent scene have been engendered by tragic passion alone or does it take an actor-personality to put it on? Would Othello, mad with jealous frenzy, have gesticulated thus before Desdemona or would even melancholy Jacques have been capable of such performance? How is it that generations of audiences and readers have debated Ophelia's report to her father without giving Hamlet credit where it seems most due, for having given renewed evidence of superb craftsmanship as an actor?

For his next actual scene before an audience Hamlet has provided himself with a befitting and useful stage: "Enter Hamlet reading on a book." In the following we can now observe Hamlet in full control of a preconceived part: Young melancholy prince assuming speech and mannerism of The Allowed Fool. Caustic comments designed to confuse Councillor and King on true nature of Prince's state of mind. He acts his scene with poise and consistency, ending it with the grand-eloquently dramatic and appropriately antic line: "Except my life, except my life, except my life!" Then Polonius takes his leave, the actor sheds his part instantaneously and mutters contemptuously, "These tedious old fools!" At the sudden entrance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, however, he shifts quite as instantaneously back to his routine part of the well-mannered, pleasant

and worldly-witty courtier who had previously been seen chatting with Horatio and Marcellus in Act I, Sc. 2. The role of the young prince, however, is so much his habitual part that he lapses most naturally and automatically, if only momentarily, into the appealing, straightforward genuineness that, piercing each and every layer of mask and disguise, is clearly and pointedly his disturbed self: "I have of late, —but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercise." etc.

The confession that man, "the paragon of animals," is now nothing to Hamlet but the "quintessence of dust" reveals a melancholy soul indeed, apparent and pitiful enough to the audience, but not so to the cruder sensitivities of the two ill-observant spies who know enough, however, of Hamlet's reputation and interests to advertise the players as excellent diversion. "For Hamlet the world of the theater is the real world of meaning," said Charles Dawson. One need only observe the change that comes over him when he welcomes the players and talks shop with them to note that, in any case, the world of the theater was a world in which Hamlet was thoroughly at home. He is animated, genuinely interested, oblivious of his melancholy and its cause. He compares notes with the troupe of fellows he hasn't seen for some time, calls for the recitation of a familiar dramatic speech, and even declaims a short passage himself. It appears that he does quite as well with a part written out by another as with a role hastily prepared by himself. Even Polonius must give him credit for lines "well spoken, with good accent and good discretion." Hamlet admonishes Polonius to see the players well bestowed. Then interestingly enough he warns the players not to do what he has himself been doing so freely, i.e. mock the old man, and after having given his instructions about the insertion of his short speech in the play for the morrow, he is in a position for the first time since he entered, reading on the book, to shed all the parts, and once more to face himself and his blunted purpose.

The ensuing reflections may, unlike the other soliloquies, be legitimately used and analyzed for our purpose, for in them Hamlet touches upon the dualism between man and mime with which we are here concerned. The enigma of Hamlet and the enigma of the natural actor (or are they perhaps one and the same riddle?) are now presented in their full complexity. How is it that a man who has been strutting, posing and gesturing through two acts and who has carefully pantomimed through an entire scene with his beloved, can here speak of a contrast between himself and a player who

But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit

That from her working all his visage wanned
Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit?

Does he not realize that although he *has* "the motive and the cue for passion," he does precisely as the actor does? He, Hamlet, "drowns the stage with tears," "cleaves the ear with horrid speech," "makes mad the guilty," "appals the free," "confounds the ignorant, and amazes indeed the faculties of eyes and ears." The curious, multiple, self-contained meaning of this scene is precisely that Hamlet *does* know that he is an actor, yet uses the player as a foil, *does* write and act out his own tragedy, yet devises the Play within the Play that becomes the foil of his own drama until reality and theatre mirror each other in a dazzling inter-play that is "the thing," rather than wresting a confession from Claudius at the point of his sword, or placing full trust in "his prophetic soul," seeking the very next opportunity to kill the King outright.

The transparent stratagem involving Ophelia gives Hamlet his next opportunity for histrionic display in which he may safely indulge, since to all and sundry it is but another exemplification of his "antic disposition." From the very first Hamlet must have suspected the concealed audience and after answering Ophelia's "How does your honor for this many a day?" with his characteristic "I humbly thank you, well, well, well," he begins his sparring. Again, it shall not here be disclaimed that Hamlet is unhappy, distraught, suspicious, or in any of the other emotional states generally ascribed to him; it shall merely be emphasized that where Antony, the soldier, berates Cleopatra with

Let him [Caesar] take thee
And hoist thee up to the shouting plebians!
Follow his chariot like the greatest spot
Of all thy sex; most monster-like, be shown
For poor'st diminutives, for doits; and let
Patient Octavia plough thy visage up
With her prepared nails,

and where Leontes, the King, condemns his wife, Hermione, with "She's an adulteress; I have said with whom; More, she's a traitor," Hamlet quixotically sends Ophelia to a nunnery and then exclaims: "I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp . . .," and leaving the scene, he has a final vigorous curtain line: "To a nunnery, go!"

To have to discuss, in my context, Hamlet's careful instructions to the Players in Act III, Sc. 2, appears almost to be an outrageously futile belabouring of my point. I cannot but feel actually distressed, however, that critics should have thought so little of Shakespeare's genius as a craftsman to have believed that those lengthy remarks were just "thrown in" gratuitously by an actor whose professional interests at this point overruled his discretion as a playwright. Should we not rather admire the consistency in character delineation that appears in the natural actor's advice to the professional actor "to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature," not to "tear a passion to tatters," nor to "saw the air too much with your hand" nor to "strut and bellow" abominably?

It is in the Play within the Play, however, that I feel all my observations on Hamlet's actor-nature merge, culminate, and are most fruitfully and most clearly borne out. Professor Francis Fergusson believes that it is in this scene "that the peculiar theatricality of *Hamlet*—ritual as theater and theater as ritual; at once the lightest improvisation and the solemnest occasion—is most clearly visible," and Professor Leslie Fiedler shows how Kyd's plot device has become "freed for its more essential, its pure mythic function." According to my own view it is of course not necessary to be that abstruse or allegorical about the Play within the Play. From the scene there may be deduced, though, three major tenets of my Hamlet-actor identification credo.

1. The fact that Hamlet should think of the play, rather than of any other method, to persuade himself of the King's guilt. (Notwithstanding Kyd's introduction of the device, all available evidence indicates that the Play within the Play has undergone far-reaching changes in Shakespeare's treatment.)

2. Hamlet's very active function as a re-writer or adapter, as a director, and finally as chorus while the show is in progress. Notice that the play has its full effect upon Claudius only when Hamlet, in what may be assumed to be more audible than sotto voice, explains the action:

A poisons him in the garden for his estate. His name's Gonzago; the story is extant, and written in very choice Italian; you shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.

Furthermore, Hamlet's awareness of his function as chorus-interpreter is emphasized by his assuming credit for the King's final "breaking" when he asks Horatio: "didst perceive?—Upon the *talk* of poisoning?"

3. The thematic significance of the Play within the Play, going beyond the universal Shakespearean theme of reality and illusion and

reemphasizing, specifically, the theme of actor-stage-theatre-audience.

Obviously, the base of the pyramid of the construction of *Hamlet* has been noted by many previous critics: the Illusion versus Reality theme. Others have ascended to a higher, as it were, more pointed level, the relation between the Illusion of the *Theatre* and the Reality of the *Audience*. My theory simply proposes to continue the ascent to the apex of the pyramid itself: Hamlet—the Actor. Why, in other words, continue to study Hamlet, the character, as detached from *Hamlet*, the play and its theme, provided of course, one accepts the Illusion-Reality theme as primary in *Hamlet* as it is primary in *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*? Or, to put it still differently, why cannot Hamlet, the character, be seen as fulfilling somewhat the same function that we usually ascribe to Prospero? If it is apparent to some that Prospero, the magician, stands for the artist-playwright, isn't it ten times more apparent that Hamlet, the Prince, stands for the artist-actor? Pursuing the analogy still further, critics have had no difficulty in perceiving that the wedding-masque in *The Tempest* serves to illustrate the process of creative imagination on the part of Prospero. Few, if any, have yet commented on the fact that the Play within the Play serves to emphasize the creation of illusion on the part of the actor, Hamlet. The fascination of the Hamlet personality riddle has blinded us to the recognition of a symbol pattern that is more obvious in the dramas of greater character simplicity.

The discussion of the Play within the Play may have clinched the point of my argument which, as is the case with every argument, is of course only as good as its premise. The remaining scenes of the play still yield an abundance of evidence, however, that should not be left altogether neglected. Thus, after having played two more brilliantly antic scenes, one with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (" 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be *played* on than a pipe?"), the other with Polonius ("Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?"), Hamlet dashes off to see his mother. (Note to squeamish critics who cannot stomach Hamlet's drinking hot blood: this is just another manifestation of a histrionic "Well roared, Lion!")

Clearly Hamlet has long set his heart on just such an interview and carefully rehearsed it many times. He has just promised himself that he "will *speak* daggers to her." He begins acting in familiar style:

Queen : Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

Hamlet : Mother, you have my father much offended.

Queen : Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

Hamlet : Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

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Then his acting rises in pitch. Eminently true to his actor-nature, Hamlet desires to set his mother up a glass where she may see the inmost part of her. "To hold the mirror up to nature," then, is the duty of the professional player much as it becomes the duty of the essential actor-son. Before Hamlet has a chance, however, to hold up his mirror, i.e. eloquently and skillfully to dramatize Gertrude's sins for her benefit, he is interrupted. The Queen's outcries are echoed by Polonius. (Literally only minutes before had Hamlet stood, alone and unobserved, watching Claudius on his knees, foregoing through transparent rationalization an ideal opportunity of accomplishing his long-comtemplated revenge.) Why, critics have asked in bewilderment, does the Prince's integral inaction now change to sudden, spontaneous, violent action? Doesn't the answer once more lie in Hamlet, the actor? Provided now with an audience, actually the only audience that counts in his drama of revenge, his mother, Hamlet performs true to his role and his part (a theatrical role gains reality, its *raison d'être*, only when there is an audience to believe in it); thus now, prompted by the categorical imperative of his "character," he whips out his rapier, and with the accompanying cadence, "How, now? a rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!" avenges (or, at least, believes he avenges) without any difficulty whatsoever.

From now on in this analysis, a summary of collective evidence culled from the end of this scene and the last two acts will serve my purpose better than a more extensive enumeration that would at this point be merely redundant. Thus, one may observe that further free rein is given to Hamlet's urge for dramatizing when in the ensuing great argument with Gertrude he combines *spéech* with "stage business"—"Look here upon this picture, and on this," the counterfeit presentment of two brothers; when he exits "tugging in Polonius" on his curtainline; "Come, sir, toward an end with you"; when he once more puts on heavily sardonic "antic masks" in his short colloquies with Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Claudius; when he paces the graveyard with a skull stage-prop; when he grapples with Laertes at Ophelia's funeral and accuses him of out-facing him with leaping in her grave; or when he bitterly scorns the inferior quality of Osric's clowning.

Hamlet has made his exits and his entrances; he has indeed played many parts. Shakespeare, in fact, has had Hamlet play the roles of virtually all the stock characters of Elizabethan drama: the melancholy gentleman in sable suit; the ungartered and downgyved mad lover; the Fool who makes knavish speeches ("Your fat king and your lean beggar"); the malcontent; the noble prince; and even, although admittedly in a mere, faint echo, the villain:

Without debatement further, more or less,
He should those bearers, put to sudden death,
Not shriving time allowed.

Let us now pause for a final, somewhat closer look at the last scene of the play. Before this gathering, which he twice deliberately calls "audience," steps Hamlet and speaks the apologia to Laertes, prologue to his last play—the play with foils. I am deliberately refraining from an interpretation of what may to others seem an obvious allegory of "play" and "foil" nor do I think my argument will benefit from a philosophical toying, even on the theatre-illusion plane, with Hamlet's words:

Was't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.

As his own end draws near and as his revenge is accomplished, Hamlet is still not above the pun: "Drink off this potion; is thy union here?" and his final curtain-speech is prefaced by:

You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or *audience* to this act.

His plea is for a *verbalized* monument to himself:

Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

And the final reluctant concession to death, unrelenting ringer down of the last heavy curtain, is:

The rest is silence.

Summing up, I have tried to show that Hamlet's actor-nature, his being the "natural actor," the "Schauspiel-Mensch," moulds and makes the tragedy as a whole. It should go far toward explaining both the Hamlet character and the *Hamlet* theme. As to the former, it makes logical, consistent, and perfectly artistic:

1. The unusual variety and changeability of Hamlet's moods.
2. The delays in his revenge. The emotionally disturbed personality confronted with an unpleasant duty to be performed will often have re-

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course to play-acting and will stage actions that he feels unable to carry out. Shakespeare the actor may well have been personally familiar with this tendency. Only when dramatization before an audience has gone to the limits of self-oblivion may actual action result, as in the stabbing of Polonius before the horrified eyes of Gertrude.

3. Hamlet's madness. Clearly all the "antic scenes" can be understood in the light of the theory of the "comic masker," the descendant of the medieval Vice.

Hamlet's need for an escape into play-acting, his use of the Play within the Play are, in turn, indirect evidence of his emotional instability, the "unweeded garden" psychosis which is certainly the whole extent of his madness; no serious critic, one would venture to rule, ever has been able to make a convincing case for Hamlet's madness going further than that.

As far as the *Hamlet* theme is concerned, I hope I have shown that my theory focuses attention on the perennially Shakespearean Illusion versus Reality concept and thus fits the tragedy firmly into a framework from which it has too often been violently separated in wrongful isolation. There is indeed no concept that is more integral in the Shakespeare canon than the dichotomy between Appearance and Essence and the baffling interchangeability of the two. Mankind in the Shakespeare universe is embroiled in an eternal *Comedy of Errors*. Thus, from the first in which Antipholous of Syracuse queries,

Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell?
Sleeping or waking? Mad or well-advised?
Known unto these, and to myself disguis'd!
I'll say as they say and persevere so,
And in this mist at all adventures go. . . ,

to the last in which Prospero sadly acknowledges that "Our revels now are ended," and that

The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind . . . ,

the same note is sounded, in varying keys, but with unmistakable clarity and persistence.

Again, the actor is the only member of society who shows up this dualism, who illustrates it, proves it, *lives* it. It is the actor's profession

to play for us with Appearance and Reality, it is his essence, nay, it is his *duty*. Who could have known and realized this better than Shakespeare, the actor-playwright? As the general philosophical concept never ceases to wind its way through all his plays, comedies, histories, tragedies, the particular theatre-actor derivative occurs and re-occurs with regularity and frequency. We note it as early as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the subtly ironic-satiric Pyramus and Thisbe play when Quince promises,

The actors are at hand, and by their show
You shall know all that you are like to know,

and when the Wall humorously-philosophically makes its grave exit,

Thus have I, Wall, my part discharged so;
And, being done, thus Wall away doth go,

only to encounter it in far subtler form in the Play within the Play in *Hamlet* and, finally in the Shepherd's Mummery in *The Winter's Tale* and the Wedding Masque of *The Tempest*. On the other hand, although most of Shakespeare's heroes grapple with the Appearance-Reality dilemma, with Iago's "Men should be what they seem," only Hamlet represents the Actor who is Player, Chorus, and victim of the tragedy of a world of Seeming and Being, a tragedy that is lightened for him by the recognition that

we are not all alone unhappy:
This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play in.

Homo Multiplex and the "Man" Equivocation in *Hamlet*

CLIFFORD J. RONAN

"Hamlet's imagery," Wolfgang Clemen plausibly maintains, "reveals the hero's wide educational background, his many-sidedness and the extraordinary range of his experience."¹ Analogous claims have rightly been formulated on behalf of other features of his tragic drama. But extended proofs of these propositions have been unfortunately slow in forthcoming.

This longest of the author's works is assuredly encyclopaedic, a fact that has prompted many attacks upon, and defenses of, the drama's unity. We have been asked to see *Hamlet* as organized around words (Ewbank), disease and putrefaction (Spurgeon, Altick), the "radical metaphor" "Act" and the "unifying image" "Show" (Mack), and so forth.² What I propose to consider in the following pages is another ubiquitous organizing principle possessing a most versatile flexibility. *Hamlet* is about man—in a fuller sense than criticism seems ever before to have acknowledged. Though everyone recognizes that the subject of *Hamlet* is in some sense man, few readers grasp how often verbal reminders of that theme appear in iterations of "man," its subsets, opposites, and synonyms. These together form vibrating strings, binding together the work's many parts and endowing them with unique resonance. The *man* motif, especially through recourse to quibbling, enforces the play's universal applications; its characteristic air of uncertainty, its sense of the multiplicity of human potential.

The universality derives in part from what has been termed the play's ever shifting "mannerist" perspectives—by turns exhilarating, challenging, disquieting³—its "interrogative mood,"⁴ its constant resort to that pur-

¹*The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (1951; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 108.

²See Richard D. Altick, "Hamlet and the Odor of Mortality," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 5 (1954), 167-76; Maurice Charney, *Style in "Hamlet"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 137-153; Inga-Stina Ewbank, "Hamlet and the Power of Words," *Shakespeare Survey* 30 (1977), 85-102; Charles R. Forker, "Shakespeare's Theatrical Symbolism and Its Function in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14 (1963), 215-29; Maynard Mack, "The World of *Hamlet*," *The Yale Review*, 41 (1952), 502-03 (especially 513, 512); Caroline F.E. Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (1935; Boston: Beacon, 1958), pp. 316-21.

³I choose to apply to *Hamlet* the art-historical term in preference to two other attractive terms of more literary provenance: "metaphysical," with its emphasis on

posely faulty parallelism known as hendiadys,⁵ and its dialogue self-described as full of "equivocation" and "pregnant . . . in replies."⁶ The names of the characters are mysteriously "cosmopolitan" and "polyglot."⁷ Startling anachronism and anachronism (as in references to the War of the Theaters, the Globe and Englishmen's supposed madness) purposely rattle an audience's sense of an early-medieval Danish setting. The central symbol, the graveyard (Hamlet's and our own), is *hic et ubique* and yet in Cain's territory, not far from the doorstep of Eden. The memory of Alexander, Caesar, figures from all Western legend and history are buried there too: giants, titans, demigods, nymphs, heroes, and villains of Greece and Troy and Rome and Carthage; denizens of Lot's⁸ and Jephtha's and Jesus' Holy Land, of the Wittenberg of Luther and Faust, poisonous

intellectuality and an unclassical desire to astound; and Harry Levin's "essayistic," with its Montaignesque connotations of informal, serious but inconclusive exploration (*The Question of Hamlet*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 11). Mannerism implies multiple perspectives even more than metaphysical wit does. The mannerist presents, in Arnold Hauser's words, life's "riches, multiplicity, variety" in such a way as to instruct and delight, "puzzling . . . the discriminating mind" with a sense of "the permanent ambiguity of all things." See Hauser's *Mannerism* 2 vols., trans. Eric Mosbacher (New York: Knopf, 1965) I, 25, 13, and the pioneering investigation of the mannerist dimension of *Hamlet* in Wylie Sypher's *Four Stages of Renaissance Style* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955). Sypher maintains that the play resembles mannerist art in its numerous "planes of reality . . . interchanging and complex" (p. 176), its "devious oblique, and seemingly improvised structure" (p. 26), its exploration of "ambiguities and complexities" (p. 117), its dependence on periodic, unsettlingly intimate soliloquies (p. 144), coupled with an odd detachment from the stream of life depicted (pp. 173, 176), and lastly its sketchy and skeptical ending—upon a note of "silence" (p. 231). I regard Sypher's case as highly suggestive, though not entirely supportable.

⁴Mack's phrase, 504.

⁵Touched upon by R.A. Foakes "Hamlet and the Court of Elsinore," *Shakespeare Survey* 5 (1956), 35-43, especially 36, and Levin p. 46, they are treated with instructive amplitude by George T. Wright, "Hendiadys and *Hamlet*," *PMLA* 96 (1981), 168-93.

⁶Unless stated otherwise, all Shakespeare citations are to the edition of G. Blake-more Evans, *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton, 1974).

⁷The first epithet is G. Wilson Knight's in "What's in a Name?" *The Sovereign Flower* (1958; London: Methuen, 1966), p. 189; the second is from Harry Levin's "Shakespeare's Nomenclature," in *Essays on Shakespeare* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 79.

⁸Actually the ballad that Hamlet quotes in 2.2.416 makes "lot" a common noun; see Harold Jenkins' New Arden ed. *Hamlet* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 476. Yet P.J. Aldus makes an interesting case for seeing in Hamlet's use of the ballad at this juncture (discussion of Jephtha) a quibbling reference to Lot; *Mousetrap: Structure and Meaning in "Hamlet"* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 77.

renaissance Italy, and the Normandy, England,⁹ and France of the Vikings.

The hero's time advances relentlessly, occasionally subject, like our own, to erratic lurching. One moment he wishes to go slowly backwards like a crab or great baby; at another, he feels his sinews grow instant old, and indeed by the last act Shakespeare takes great pains to insist that this romantic young hero has reached the unglamorous age of thirty. No auditor or reader is permitted to ignore the biological cycle, of which the reproductive phases are especially kept in mind. There is conception ("Young men will do't if they come to it./By Cock"), birth, tendering of fools, complying with the dug, boyhood on pickaback, crackvoiced puberty, hot youth, confused maidenhood ("a young maid's wits" are "as mortal as an old man's life"), unseemly lustful middle age, and "impotent" weak-hammed senility. Finally, there is the absurd progress that not just famous kings and caesars go, through a worm and a beggar's gut into the bung-hole of an ale barrel. Meanwhile there lingers, waiting for ale, the sardonic symbol of Death, employed on Hamlet's birthday to bury him after his fatal duel, an event ominously facilitated by the visit of one LaMord. *Hamlet* sums up all history whether of the individual or the group, from Adam's day to Christmas Day to Doomsday. As if fresh from a perusal of the *OED*, characters keep discussing the behavior of "man," the race and the individual: of husbands; vassals; attendants; workmen; soldiers; male adults; creatures of body and soul; courageous, assertive, yet protective masculine beings, aware of their capacity for tears, their feminine intuition and their share in humanity, its monuments, and its claims. Foremost among the many signs of the play's attention to "man"—the word and concept—are, doubtless, the *memento mori* episodes in the graveyard, Polonius's maxims, and the frequent attention-getting word play on "man," its cognates, and its antonyms.

The quality and quantity of the play's references to "man" are significant. They form part of Claudius's castigation of Hamlet for "unmanly" grief in the second scene, of Polonius's lectures on gentlemanly behavior, and of almost half the protagonist's own major sententious speeches and setpieces. Such allusions are central, for instance, in Hamlet's aria "What [a] piece of work is a man," his graveyard satire; his diatribes against "pernicious woman [']s" pretence and "frailty," his analysis of his father's

⁹As befits the play's multifaceted chronological setting, Claudius's reference to "tribute" owed Denmark from England (3.2.170 ff.) goes beyond an allusion to the Danegeld; Jenkins feels it has a "topical overtone" (p. 286): a mere two or three years before the composition of *Hamlet* Elizabethans had been asked to pay Denmark an annual sum.

and Horatio's masculinity and humanity; his instructions on how not to imitate humanity *ab-hominably*¹⁰; his meditations on the sparrow, the dram of eale, and the longevity of a dead man's fame; and his soliloquies "What is a man?" "To be or not to be" and "What a rogue and peasant slave am I."

From Polonius we learn that gentlemen may drab but ladies must remain chaste, that apparel oft "proclaims the man," and that with fidelity to self we cannot be "false to any man." When Hamlet is onstage, we hear that a "man's life's no more than to say 'one'"; that to be honest as this world goes is to be "one man pick'd out of ten thousand"; that if one used "every man after his own desert," no mere human would escape whipping. A "man" will be destroyed by inward impostume or dram of eale even if he is blessed "As infinite as man may undergo." If "a great ma[n]" (other than a Caesar or Alexander) would outlast his memory six months, he had better turn tanner. Life is lived in the glass of "man's eyes," "man's censure," and "the proud man's contumely." Subjectivity is at once a danger and a defense: to know "a man well were to know himself." Or, as Sir Thomas Browne put it less quibblingly, "No man can judge another, because no man knows himself."¹¹ The need for such knowledge is either fulfilled or rendered irrelevant in the bourn of death, for which, "Since no man, of aught he leaves, knows aught, what is't to leave betimes[?]"

More than our own age, that of the composition of *Hamlet* was attracted to collective nouns and broad generalizations, many typical examples of which are found in this very drama, as historical criticism established in the 1930s and 40s. Like other renaissance literature, *Hamlet* echoes with "man" and allied terms. So too does much modern criticism of the play.¹² But strangely enough, no prior student of the play seems

¹⁰Jenkins, p. 289.

¹¹*Religio Medici* II.4; first noted by A.W. Verity (1904) according to John Dover Wilson's explanatory note to the corresponding *Ham.* line. New Cambridge, *Ham.*, 2nd ed. (1936; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954).

¹²With a chorus of voices, the critics over the past fifty years proclaim the universal humanity of plot, protagonist, and theme. Thus Dover Wilson concludes the introduction to his ed. in 1934 with the apostrophe of Anatole France to the Prince:

...you are what each of us is, a man in the midst of universal ill [You] think... like both a medieval monk and a *savant* of the renaissance.... Many claim that you are a shopful of ideas, a mass of contradictions, and no human being at all. But there, on the contrary lies the sign of your profound humanity.

(*La Vie Litteraire* 1.7-8, translation mine)
Terence Hawkes says Hamlet is about oral-aural man and the clash of tender manhood with "spurious 'manliness'"; *Shakespeare's Talking Animals* (London: Arnold, 1973), pp. 122-129. Jenkins sees the conflict emblematically in Hamlet's contrast of

to have called special attention to this verbal structure, subjecting it to analysis and considering how it contributes to theme, plot, and characterization. In passing, Louis Marder remarked that *man* appears to be "the most frequent word after the so-called 'insignificant' ones and just

Hyperion and a satyr: this "antithesis between the sun god with his majestic beauty, and creature half man, half beast epitomizes in the two brothers the complex nature of man" (p. 438).

For psychological criticism, Hamlet is an archetypal story of difficult male maturation: "youth" (Erikson) imperfectly cured of the universal male complaint, an Oedipal complex (Jones), and unable to exploit his female anima (Leverenz, Erlich). See Erik H. Erikson *Youth: Change and Challenge* 1.1 (1961), rpt. *Humanitas* 8 (Feb. 1972), 21-35; Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (New York: Norton, 1949); David Leverenz, "The Woman in Hamlet: An Interpersonal View," *Signs* 4 (1978), rpt. *Representing Shakespeare*, edd. Murray M. Schwartz and Coppelia Kahn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 110-128; Avi Erlich, *Hamlet's Absent Father* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 174-77, 259.

For other critics and analysts of literary backgrounds, "Hamlet is about us all" (James). The hero—with all his "many-sided activity," "curiosity," "manifold interests," and donning of multiple identities—is "all mankind's epitome" (Buliough), "all life's epitome" (Foakes). And his story is "a paradigm of the life of man" (Mack, 503). See D. G. James, *The Dream of Learning* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), p. 48; Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* 8 vols. (London: Routledge, 1957-75), 7; 51-56; R. A. Foakes, "Character and Speech in Hamlet," *Hamlet*, ed. John Russell Brown, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies No. 5 (London: Arnold, 1963), pp. 148-62, especially p. 151.

Further we read that *Hamlet* presents "the age[s] conflict between two views of man's nature" (Spencer), between "human potential of great subtlety and infinite extent, and a human situation that must of necessity frustrate it" (Chaudhuri). The subject is, as "Tillyard [says,] . . . the baffling human predicament" of mortality—decay, disease, or what "Miss Spurgeon" terms the "chief tragic mystery of life . . . human weakness, the instability of human purpose, the subjection of humanity to fortune—all that we might call the aspect of failure in man." (Mack, "The World of *Hamlet*"). The work soars because of its commentary on "man's inescapable duality" (Bush). And the "Tragic Hero, ultimately, is humanity . . . itself, suffering from . . . Evil itself" (Kitto). Or again, it is "man—haunted man—with his mind on the frontier of two worlds" (Lewis). At very least, it is "Shakespeare Man," the ideal "Englishman" wrapped within a typical "figure of the European consciousness" (Murray). See Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 94; Sukanta Chaudhuri, *Infirm Glory: Shakespeare and the Renaissance Image of Man* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 145; Mack, 515-18; Douglas Bush, "Time and Man" (1957), *Prefaces to Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 65-90 (p. 89, cf. 88); H.D. Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama* (1956), excerpted in John Jump's casebook, *Shakespeare: "Hamlet"* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 114; C.S. Lewis, *Hamlet: The Prince or The Poem* Shakespeare Lecture, British Academy, 1942, in *Hamlet: Enter Critic*, edd. Elaine Sacks and Edgar Whan (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960), especially p. 184; John Middleton Murray, *Shakespeare* (1936; New York: Jonathan Cape, 1965), pp. 189-91.

a few of the common words."¹³ However, Maynard Mack, though the subtlest formalist commentator on the play, inexplicably omits "man" from his list of the half dozen "keywords," images, and concepts in *Hamlet*. Despite the attention given to the *man* theme in *Hamlet* by historical critics, there remain important gaps to fill not only in formalist study but in the area of the history of ideas as well. To these two interrelated concerns the present pages, therefore, are addressed.

The sheer number of times that "man," its cognates, and its antonyms appear is large, though seemingly no greater than in a half dozen other Shakespearean plays.¹⁴ What renders *Hamlet* Shakespeare's most profound and spacious comment on man is not numbers so much as the decision to employ a Christian humanist prince as hero. In revamping the old revenge *Ur-Hamlet*, Shakespeare created an aristocratic punster, outstanding not just for sword play but also for learning,¹⁵ interest in the stage, and devotion (unlike Laertes's) to attending a university. Since antiquity, the study of God and man—"the double science" of "dyuynyte and humanyte" (Caxton)¹⁶—were assumed to nurture man's sweet reasonableness and

¹³Louis Marder, "A New Shakespeare Concordance: Research Opportunities," *Shakespeare Newsletter* 19 (Feb. 1969), 8.

¹⁴For *Ham.*, Marvin Spevack, *The Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1973) records an above-normal number of such words as "man," "woman," "mankind," and "manly." Such words are also important in several other tragedies (*Tit.*, *Rom.*, *Oth.*, *Lr.*, *Tim.*, *Ant.*, *Cor.*) and a few other plays (e.g., *Ado.*). For an introduction to the motifs underlying such words, see Robert B. Heilman, "Manliness in the Tragedies: Dramatic Variations," in *Shakespeare 1564-1964*, ed. E. A. Bloom (Providence: Brown University Press, 1964), pp. 19-37.

¹⁵Besides Brutus ("This was a man!") and Hamlet, no one in Shakespeare customarily reads and reflects upon the "humanities" on stage. The Prince seems familiar with a satirical rogue (Juvenal in *Satire* 10?) and works like Cicero's life-and-death *Tusculan Questions*; see T.W. Baldwin, *Shakespeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1944), II, 606-07; and Rolf Soellner, *Shakespeare's Patterns of Self-Knowledge* ([Columbus:] Ohio State University Press, 1972), p. 187.

¹⁶OED, s.v. "humanity"; cf. Sir Francis Bacon's reference to his age's interest in all "ancient Authors, both in Diuinitie and in Humanitie," *The Two Books of The Proficience and Advancement of Learning*, English Experience No. 218 (1605; rpt. New York: Da Capo, 1970), sig. E3r. As Baker sees, Sir Thomas Elyot defines "humanities" as, in effect, a clear-sighted social sense: "The nature and condition of man, wherein he is lesse than god almightie, and excellenge . . . all other creatures in erthe, is called humanities; which is a generall name to all those vertues in whome semeth to be a mutuall concorde and loue in the nature of man." See Herschel Baker, *The Image of Man: A Study of the Idea of Human Dignity in Classical Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance* (1947; New York: Harper, 1961). p. 295.

spur well-informed kindness to one's fellow man. Cicero speaks of the humanities or humane letters as *studia humanitatis* and in turn refers to kindness as the sweetness of humaneness, *suavitas humanitatis*.¹⁷ When Hamlet demonstrates a care for others, he usually does so in a bookish fashion, as when he alludes to the supposed nearness of Doomsday, advises Polonius how to measure care for the actors, or engages in quasi-democratic conversations with his university comrade Horatio. Shakespeare would have agreed with the great Neo-Platonist Ficino, namely, that

Man proves himself a member of the human race by loving other men as his equals, by being humane. When he is inhumane and cruel, he removes himself from the community of mankind and forgets his human dignity.

(Marsilio Ficino, "Letter to Tommaso Minerbetti")¹⁸

According to one of Hamlet's many submerged quibbles, this courtier-soldier-scholar represents "humanity" in no fewer than three senses: human mortality, dispositions and deeds that are "kind," and devotion to the best literature of the occident.

Hamlet is not Shakespeare's only troubled and ironical protagonist, the only one who is a renaissance Christian intellectual. Thus, mannerist *Hamlet* is able to contain a larger collection of subtle, philosophical insights into "man" than any of the other works do. *Hamlet* alone best captures the renaissance confusion—not yet out of date—about human identity and purpose. "Every man," adds Hamlet to the play's *man*-motif, "has *business* and desire/Such as it is" (1.5.130), a notion echoed, in part, some two acts later by the kneeling figure of Claudius feeling like "a man to *double business* bound" (3.3.41). Though his wife may have a heart split in "twain," Claudius is implicated here, we should note, in *multiple* not just *ambi-guous*, or "double," identities: he would simultaneously be king, husband, and forgiven murderer.

The renaissance keeps emphasizing man's doubleness, as historical criticism has amply documented.

¹⁷Ancient "Roman Stoic[ism]" advocated "cultural refinement" "combined with" "a high regard for other persons as human beings"; see Paul Kristeller, "The Philosophy of Man in the Italian Renaissance," *Italica* 34 (1947): 93-112, rpt. *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1956), p. 271. Michael Grant explains that Cicero's own word, *humanitas*, "summed up" "the qualities of mind and character of a man who is civilized"; see Grant's *Roman Readings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p. 30. See also *pro. Caelio* 25 for "*suavitate humanitatis*," whose seminal influence is discussed in Eduard van Jan's comprehensive article on "humanity" through the ages: "Humanite," *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 55 (1932), 1-66, especially 3.

¹⁸Cited in Kristeller (n. 17 above), p. 272.

... we are ... double our selves, which is the cause, that what we beleeve, we beleeve it not, and cannot rid our selves of that, which we condemne.

(Michel de Montaigne, *Essays* II.16)¹⁹

Or as George Chapman puts it, "of what contraries consists a man!"

Corruption, and eternnesse, at one time,

.....

We have not any strength but weakens us.

(*Tragedy of Byron V*)²⁰

Man is "Born under one law, to another bound" (Fulke Greville), and if lucky, he will experience only "agreeing discords ... between the body and the soul" (La Primaudaye).²¹

Just as Claudius's recourse to the trio of crown-ambition-queen complicates his picture of man to "double" business bound, Bacon too resorts to "triplicitie" frequently, seeing "all things marked ... with this triple Character of ... God, ... Nature, and ... Man"—with every human finding himself a subject of (and heir to?) three *kingdoms*: heaven, the physical universe, and the state.²² Hamlet also often extends beyond singularities and paired dichotomies to, as Levin briefly notes, triads, some even quite strained ones, as in

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell?

(1.5.92-93)

This is as oddly tense a triangle as is the one of which Marvell informs us: "Tortured ... / In a vain head and double heart."²³ In 1509, the Neo-

¹⁹Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, 3 vols. (London: Dent, 1910), II, 342.

²⁰This and all subsequent references to Chapman are from *George Chapman*, ed. William Lyon Phelps, Mermaid (London: Unwin, [1895]): see p. 468.

²¹Bush (n. 12 above), p. 88, quotes Fulke Greville; Soellner (n. 15 above), p. 54, quotes La Primaudaye's *French Academy* (1589 ed., p. 18).

²²Bacon, *ibid.*, see also Fulton H. Anderson's "Introduction," to his ed., Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), p. xvi. Many commentators on *Hamlet* have remarked upon the duple perception (*cum* articulation) in its protagonist, the play itself, and the age or culture that it mirrors. Many students too, (though probably fewer) have stressed the corresponding *multifariousness* of the play, hero, and culture. But I am aware of no other critic who has suggested that multivalence derives in part from the undermining of duality by triplicity. The only critic in whom I have perceived any interest at all, however fleeting, in the resort to triads in *Hamlet* is Harry Levin (*Question*, pp. 79-80).

²³Andrew Marvell, *Dialogue between Soul and Body*, cited by Bush (n. 12 above), p. 88.

Aristotelian Pietro Pompanazzi had helped undergird the binary and ternary nature of man philosophically, giving mankind ("*Homo*") the name "*multiplex*":

Man is clearly not of simple but of multiple [*multiplicis*], not of certain but of ambiguous [*ancipitis*, lit. "double-headed" thus "amphibious" or "wavering"]²⁴ nature . . . since he includes three souls . . . and . . . claims a twofold nature . . . neither unqualifiedly mortal nor unqualifiedly immortal. . . . Some [men] are numbered with the gods, . . . Some . . . [,] beasts Some [,] . . . normal men.

(*On the Immortality of the Soul*, Ch. I)²⁵

Hardly less multifarious is the image that the neo-Platonist Marsilio Ficino has of man's soul: "all things together," "the middle term of all things, . . . the face of all, . . . the bond and juncture of the universe."²⁶ "*Man*," wrote a much quoted Greek Father, Gregory of Nazianzus, "*is the bond and chaine which tieth together both natures*" (Sir Walter Raleigh).²⁷ He is "Prote[an]," says Ficino's disciple Pico, "The bond, nay, rather the marriage song of the world," endowed with neither mortality nor immortality but, rather, with

. . . the seeds of . . . every way of life. Whatever seeds each man cultivates will . . . bear in him their own fruit [,] . . . vegetative, . . . brutish [,] . . . rational

(Pico della Mirandola, *Dignity of Man*, 1-4)²⁸

Man can metamorphose into anything, and anything into man.²⁹ Since man is thus at the crossroads of the universe, a drama about him should be, as *Hamlet* is, unusually rich with allusions and images. Like *Hamlet* and his associates, audiences march in *thought* down the great chain from

²⁴Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879), s.v. "anceps."

²⁵Selection from the English version of William Henry Hay II can be found in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, edd. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, John Herman Randall Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 282-3; the corresponding Latin original is in Kristeller's *Studies* (n. 17 above), p. 274.

²⁶Tr. Josephine L. Burroughs, in Kristeller (n. 17 above), p. 268.

²⁷Sir Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World*, ed. C.A. Patrides (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, [1972]). p. 126.

²⁸Tr. Elizabeth Livermore Forbes, in Cassirer *et al.* (n. 25 above), pp. 225, 223.

²⁹Appropriately, in a play where persons turn into nutshells and clouds into weasels and whales, the audience is asked to recall that the path from man to non-man is reversible. Though the London audience is not quite explicitly reminded here that in England a "monster" "would make a man" (*Tmp.* 2.1.30), *Ham.* does insist that in England a journeyman will make a man, and that in her theaters man is often created out of most ab-hominable oratorical caricature.

God to gods and nymphs, demigods, angels, and the majestic yet possibly devilish spirit of a Herculean king. Below the rank of even-Christens jostle painted women, heathens, Moors, satyrs, centaurs, other monsters, demons; and "piece[s]" of the human "machine" (ear, heart, eye, mouth, face, hair, skull, voice, jawbone, sinew, guts, rotten brainpan, lap and privates, shadow, impostume, hectic in the blood, pickers and stealers). The list is not exhaustive. Beneath man are the deer and brute tiger; the ass, camel, steed, jade, ape, calf, and other "loos[ed]" domestic animals; the pelican, hawk, owl, chough, woodcock, lapwing, dove, pigeon, capon, dog, gib, weasel, bat, rat, mouse, serpent, adder, canker, worm, chameleon, waterfly, "buzz[ing]" insect, whale, shark, carp, crab, sponge, jelly; nutshell, pipe, deadman's fingers, coil, desk, prison, hobbyhorse, button, brooch, sword, glass, painting, card, enseamed sheet, pearl, loam, gross earth, and final clay or dust that is the end and start and name of this everything "man." Spevack reveals that none of Shakespeare's plays have more references to dust, and these obviously constitute part of the man motif. For the renaissance well knew the "earthly" (*adhamah*, *humus*) etymology of the Hebrew and Latin words for man (*Adham*, *homo*).³⁰

Throughout the literature of the age, and especially in *Hamlet*, there is the sense that a creature capable of everything may lack any certain identity and be capable of next to nothing. This note is a continual undertone in Montaigne, as when he admits, "the best good I have, hath some vicious taint" or when he discovers everywhere, even in himself, the amorphousness of life.

Life is a motion unequall, irregular, and multiforme (II. 3); . . . man is a wonderfull, vaine, diverse and wavering subject (I. 1); If I speake diversly of my selfe, it is because I looke diversely upon my selfe. All contrarieties are found in her accordingly to some turne or removing I have nothing to say entirely, simply, and with soliditie of my selfe; without confusion, disorder, blending, mingling (II. 1).

(*Essays*)³¹

As Sir Thomas Browne (c. 1635) keeps stressing, we are erratic because "we are all monsters, . . . a composition of Man and Beast" like the

On the question of the reversibility of renaissance correspondences, Michel Foucault is especially clear; *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Section* (*Les mots et les choses*, 1966); (New York: Random, 1971), pp. 17-25, especially p. 22.

³⁰cf. F. Robert Estienne's (1503-1559) famous *Dictionarium seu linguae Thesaurus* (1531; Paris, 1740) s.v. "HOMO" which states that the Latin words *Homo* in Hebrew means earth-formed ("*Hebraei Adam [quo nomine terra natum significant]*") and that the Latin derives from either the Greek word for harmony (*homonaias*) or, according to Varro, "*ab Humo*," the word for earth or soil.

³¹II. 20, p. 97; II. 3, p. 38; I.i., p. 19; II.1, p. 14.

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centaur "Chiron" but given to "equivocal and monstrous productions." "Man" is the "true *Amphibium* whose nature is disposed to live . . . in divided and distinguished worlds." Our existence is both double and fivefold, amphibious and what could be called *penta-bious*:

We are . . . that amphibious piece . . . , that middle form that links . . . and makes good the Method of God and Nature

[F]irst we are a rude mass, and in the ranks of creatures which onely are, and have a dull kind of being, not yet priviledged with life, or preferred to sense or reason; next we live the life of Plants, the life of Animals, and the life of Men, and at last the life of Spirits, running on in one mysterious nature those five kinds of existences, which comprehend the creatures, not onely of the World, but of the Universe.

(*Religio Medici*)³²

We "relish," as Hamlet puts it in 3.1, of "our old stock" despite being engrafted through baptism with the bud of a *novus homo*; indeed what should such slithering amphibia as we do "crawling between earth and heaven?" (117, 127-8).

A sense of the contingency and partial absurdity of all human action probably helped prompt the renaissance obsession with the antique idea of the *theatrum mundi*. If man's actions are not always in his control and, when they are, if their efficacy is not his to determine, man's life begins to look like Someone Else's play. In *Hamlet*, the separation is more apparent than real between the strutting player following a basic script while out heroding Herod and the supposedly more autonomous Fortinbras "with divine ambition puff'd," making his own pile of massacred innocents.

Princess Mary's preceptor, Juan Luis Vivès, wrote that "man is himself a fable and a play," and worthy of being described as a masquer, created in Jove's image to entertain the Olympians by donning a series of "mask[s]." Man moves from "plant, acting a simple life without sensation," to "a thousand wild beasts," to himself (Jove's image), and to the "gods" themselves.³³ Nothing seems more natural to Shakespeare's characters than to see themselves theatrically. Polonius can see the possibility of "play[ing] the desk or table-book." Hamlet is fond of theater, ponders its "mirror" of "man," and uses it to clarify his sense of self and "antic" strategies for action. Yet the prince views histrionic man with considerable ambivalence. The thought of the player's passion at first

³²Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* in *The Consolation of Philosophy . . . Boethius . . . Thomas a Kempis . . . Browne* (New York: Modern Library, 1943), pp. 379, 361, 357-58.

³³Juan Luis Vives, "A Fable About Man," tr. Nancy Lenkeith, Cassirer, *et al.* (n. 25 above), pp. 387-93.

inspires, then revolts Hamlet when he sees his own temptation to the counterfeit exaggerations of love and sorrow of a drab (or stallion?). Like Montaigne, Hamlet is struck by the tawdriness of the stage, and borrows from it metaphors to apply to his enemy Claudius, the clownish-devilish "Vice," the patchock,³⁴ the "king of shreds and patches." This last phrase in particular could suggest Shakespeare's indebtedness to Florio's manuscript of Montaigne, who ironically views multiplex histrionic man as

... framed of flaps and patches and so shapeless and divers a con-
texture, that every peece and every moment playeth his part. And there
is as much difference found between us and our selves, as there is be-
tween our selves and other. *Magnam rem puta, unum hominem agere.*
Esteem it a great matter to play but one man (II.1).

Man . . . is but a botching and party-colored worke (II.20).

(*Essays*, italics supplied)³⁵

Hamlet is the story of a clown-prince. By play's end, he finally clings consistently to a gentlemanly, princely role, and yet ignoring his intuitions of danger, plays his last acts improvisationally, as a clown might.

Obviously, dialogue, presentational imagery, and implicit themes suggest the importance to *Hamlet* of thoughts about theater, subterfuge, death, delay, vengeance, learning, kindness, and the like, as well as about man. But what makes the *man* motif especially worth attention is that it is one of the few of the drama's topics to have conscious attention called to it by means of word play. Even more than the word and concept "act," "man" in *Hamlet* is treated to repeated punning, a trick of style that this English Ovid used as structural and thematic device in several works, oftener than not perhaps in those written during the middle years of his career.³⁶

³⁴Jenkins' case (p. 305) is convincing for preferring *patchock* (puny "patch" or clown) to *peacock* as the meaning of the Q2 "paiock" and F "Paiocke."

³⁵*Essays*, II.1, p. 14; II.20, p. 401. Scholars have spoken of as many as 170 purported debts in the Shakespearean corpus to Montaigne, though one of the wisest recent students, Robert Ellrodt, believes that in perhaps the most Montaignesque of the works, *Hamlet*, the debts are not likely to extend beyond a half dozen pairs of passages. Ellrodt does not classify among his six pairs the patches passages that I have cited above; see "Self-Consciousness in Montaigne and Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Survey* 28 (1975), 37-50, especially 41.

³⁶I am thinking particularly of *Oth.*, with organizing quibbles on "honest," "know," and "lie"; or *Ado*, *Lear* and *Cym* with quibbles on the "noting"—"noth[ing]"—("nutting") homonyms. Formalism proved what Dover Wilson said some fifty years ago: that a Shakespearean quibble "connec[ts] together a whole train of images" "with interwoven thread" and acts like "a musical chord," variously "to be resolved in whatever fashion he pleased," pp. xxxv-vii.

Punning is easy on the word "man," for it is especially rich in cognates, antonyms, and what one might call positive and negative comparatives ("angel," "beast," etc.). But in *Hamlet* such words become the subject of pointed word play on a startling total of occasions: a half dozen or more. The first undoubted case occurs in 1.2.³⁷

Hor. I saw [your father] once, a was a goodly king.

Ham. A was man, take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again.
(186-88)

In preparation for and as foreshadowing of this democratic preference for "man" over the climactic nomenclature "king," Shakespeare has just made Hamlet reject the label "servant" for that of "friend":

Hor. . . . your poor servant, ever.

Ham. Sir, my good friend—I'll change that name with you.
(162-63)

Subsequent quibbling interchanges occur in later scenes: the "man delights not me" speech of 2.2; the praise of Horatio in 3.2 and Hamlet Senior in 3.4; the "man and wife" quips of 4.3; the riddling identification of Ophelia's grave in 5.1; and the advice in 5.2 to Horatio to reject Roman suicide in the name of universal manliness. In addition, there are various man-related quibbles of a momentary sort; for instance in the echoing sounds, in 4.7, of "gentleman of Normandy . . . A Norman . . . A Norman"; or the mention of the "humorous man[']s]" playing his *noisy* part "in *peace*" (2.2); or, again, the allusion to the Prayer Book's words: "Man is like a thing of nought; his time passeth like a shadow"³⁸:

Ham. The king's a thing—

Guild. A thing, my Lord?

Ham. Of nothing.

(4.2. 28-30)

Quibbling helps Shakespeare continually force his audiences to recall man's dizzyingly multiple potential.

³⁷Though William Empson calls Hamlet's use of "man" in preference to "king" in that scene "the stock example of a pregnant use [of a word] in its full form," he neither exhaustively scrutinizes the interchange nor relates it to the chief structures and themes of the rest of the play. See "Pregnancy," in his *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951), especially pp. 321-6.

³⁸See Dover Wilson, p. xl; Jenkins, p. 526.

Ham. What³⁹ piece of work is a man, . . . how infinite . . . , how like an angel . . . , how like a god! . . . the paragon of animals; . . . quintessence of dust? Man delights not me—nor woman neither Why did ye laugh . . . ?

Ros. . . . if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you.

(2.2.303-17)

In these dozen or so lines, "man" travels through numerous explicit definitions ("angel," "god," "animal," "dust"), only to be provisionally translated as *non-woman*, then to return to the meaning *humanity*, and then finally to partake of the sense of particular personal *male* friends or *companions*.

On each other occasion when a "man" related word is used, especially if used with a quibble, audiences were in effect reminded of one or more of the age's important commonplaces on this subject. In 4.3, when Hamlet quotes from the Bible—and more specifically from the marriage service—the words "man and wife are one flesh," audiences were perhaps prompted to define "man" as a straightforward and kind human, recalling how the service (in diction suggestive of Hamlet) inveighs also against misapprehending one's humanness and marrying with a "corrup[t]" "heart" and in the "carnal" "lusts of . . . brute beasts that have no understanding."⁴⁰

In 3.2 Shakespeare has Hamlet prepare for several subsequent conversations, particularly the *Roman-man* quibble of 5.2. When, in this prior scene, Hamlet makes "Something too much" of Horatio as an ideal "man" this last term may have, for the knowing auditors, a hint of more than one definition: not just of an "excellently masculine adult male," but also of "attendant" and even "husband."

Ham. What ho, Horatio!

Enter HORATIO.

Hor. Here, sweet Lord, at your service.

Ham. Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man
As e'er my conversation cop'd withal.

³⁹With Jenkins (p. 253) and unlike Evans, I suspect that the archaic exclamatory form in Q2 is likelier to be what Shakespeare wrote than is the modernized "What a . . ." reading of F.

⁴⁰Cf. "For this cause shall a *man* leave father and mother, *and* shall be joined unto his *wife*, and they two shall be *one flesh*" (italics supplied); matrimony is not to be "taken in hand unadvisedly, . . . to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding"; and "Let [wives' primary] . . . apparel . . . not be outward . . . but let the hid man which is in the heart, be without all corruption." See *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1559, ed. John E. Booty (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1976), pp. 297-99, 290.

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Hor. O my Lord—

Ham. Nay, do not think I flatter,

.....

Why should the poor be flatter'd?

.....

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice

And could of men distinguish her election,

Sh' hath seal'd thee for herself.

.....

A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards

Hast ta'en with equal thanks.

.....

Give me that man

That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him

In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,

As I do thee.

(3.2.52-74)

Overall, the dominant definition of Horatio's manliness in the passage above is that of god-like Stoical *apatheia* and self-mastery, popularized by writers like Lipsius.

... being formelie settled against all casualties, bearing thy self vpright in all misfortunes, neither puffed vp nor pressed downe with either fortune, thou maist challenge to thy self that great title, the neerest that man can haue to God, *To be immooeable*.

(Justus Lipsius, *Two Books of Constancy* I.vi)⁴¹

But this doctrine does not control the initial sense in which the Shakespeare passage refers to being a "man." Instead, when "poor" Horatio comes running to say "at your service" upon Hamlet's hillo, an audience will provisionally define Horatio's being a "just" "man" in terms, partly, of servitor status. And possibly for a moment, depending on Hamlet's gestures, a fleeting hint will develop of Horatio as "mistress": Hamlet's chosen "man," "seal'd" in a "convers[e]" marital or *courtois*, consummated in the "core" of Hamlet's heart.⁴²

⁴¹Tr John Stradling (1594); cited by Baker (n. 16 above) p. 303, also in reference to Horatio. See Iustus Lipsius, *Tvvo Bookes of Constancie*, ed. Rudolf Kirk (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1939), p. 83.

⁴²I do not recall seeing the sexual implications of this conversation analyzed in such details even by psychological critics. Yet it has been some years since James Russell Lowell (on hints, perhaps, from Goethe and others) pinpointed this conversation to confirm his view that Horatio is, platonically at least, Hamlet's "man" in the sense of husband; see *Among My Books, First Series* (1870; Boston: Houghton, 1898), p. 216.

The most complex man-quibbles in *Hamlet*, and the ones most universalizing, are those organized not so much around gender or domestic service as around other sources of social and ontological status. *Hamlet*, like the age, reverts to paradoxical or mannerist fashion, often to ring changes on the graduated terms *man*, *king*, *god*. We have already taken note of Hamlet's rejection of "king" for "man" when praising his father. This would awaken in an audience a conventionally unconventional reevaluation like that which would soon be aimed at in *All's Well* (c. 1602) or *Bussy D'Ambois* (c. 1604) regarding the primacy of the title "man":

Laf. Are you companion to Count Roussillion?

Par. To any count, to all counts: to what is man.

Laf. To what is count's man . . . I must tell thee, sirrah, I write man; to which title age cannot bring thee.

(*All's Well*, 2.3.192-99)

Tam. Man is a name of honor for a king;

Additions take away from each chief thing.

(*Bussy D'Ambois*, 4.1.49-50)

In an age of both monarchical centralism and of religious controversy, anything that seemed to upset the social or ontological hierarchies held great fascination. To aspects of this doctrine several characters in *Hamlet* allude, but none more evocatively than Ophelia, who in 4.5. 43-44 unmistakably echoes the First Epistle of John to the effect that though we know what we are now through our Christianity—namely "sonnes of God"—we know not what even greater fate finally attends us.⁴³ Thinkers

⁴³I agree with Jenkins (p. 350) that there is "an ironic echo of 1 John iii. 2" in Ophelia's "They say the owl was a baker's daughter, Lord, we know what we are, but not what we may be. God be at your table." The fable refers to Jesus' transformation of an evil person, much as John refers to His present and future transformations of the Christian:

Through justification in Christ, now *are we* the sonnes of God, but yet it doeth not appeare what we shalbe: and *we know* that when he shal appeare *we shalbe* like him . . . And euerie man that hathe this hope in him, purgeth himself, *euen as he is pure*.

(1 John 3:2-3, italics supplied)

See *The Geneva Bible* facsim. with intro., Lloyd E. Barry (1560; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), sig. E.Ee. 3r. A possibly significant fact, apparently never before commented upon, is that this verse formed part of the Evensong readings for April 27, 1601—a month and date after which it is not impossible that Ophelia's biblical allusion (in Q1, Q2, and F) was written. See "Almanack," *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 39.

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in the renaissance and reformation were not insensitive to the levelling implications of the birth of our Counterpart, the Son of Man, Second Adam and Only Begotten of the King of Heaven. This God, whose likeness we are, is Love (1 John) and Logos or Reason (John, Clement of Alexandria): He it is whom we find when we know and are true to ourselves, to God, and to our fellow men.⁴⁴

But not everyone was consistently excited by man's potential for deification through participation in the Body of which Christ is the Head. Not for Tamburlaine, for instance, was the traditional *crown* of sainthood; he and his peers (and any auditors who sympathized with them) felt superior to all deities, preferring the sweet fruition of an "earthly crown."⁴⁵

⁴⁴The doctrine of the "one perfect bodie" with its "members and head" (*Geneva Bible, ibid.*, marginal gloss "c") is Pauline. (e.g. 1 Corinthians 12:12). The identification of God with Love is from 1 John 4:8, while the equation of Christ with Logos (Reason, the Word) is from John 1. He who seeks out and enshrines thoughtful, kind Reason within has found, and in part become, God. The status among Anglicans of the slightly radical theologian Clement of Alexandria can be guessed by the fact that Milton praised him (*Areopagetica* 1644) as one of the ancientest fathers and that the Papacy had decanonized him in 1586. According to Clement in his *Paedagogus* (Tutor) 3.1, the intellect or "'inner man'" can take on the form of the Logos and become identical with the will of God; accordingly, Clement quotes with approval the dictum of Heraclitus: "'Men are gods, gods men; this is Logos'" (Ferguson). Man achieves "adoption into sonship, 'deification'" and discovers "the indwelling power of the Word himself in the sanctuary of the soul" (Chadwick). See *Areopagetica* in John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey, 1957: p. 729; John Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria* (New York: Twayne, 1974), pp. 90, 144-49; Henry Chadwick, "Clement of Alexandria (Titus Flavius Clemens)," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago: Benton, 1973).

⁴⁵The tradition of saints' crowns (rather than victory wreaths) is traceable to at least the late sixth century, to a Sinai monk John, author of *The Heavenly Ladder* (*Climax*); See Gerhart B. Ladner, "Some Recent Publications in the Classical Tradition in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and on Byzantium," *Traditio*, 10 (1954), 578-93, especially 593.

The Tamburlaineans' inverted ladder of perfection is twice described:

Usumcasane. To be a king is half to be a god
Theridams. A god is not so glorious as a king.
 I think the pleasure they enjoy in heaven
 Can not compare with kingly joys in earth:
 To wear a crown...
 ...[that] carr[ies] with it life and death:
 To ask and have, command and be obeyed...

(1 Tamburlaine 2.5. 56-62)

perfect bliss and sole felicity.

The sweet fruition of an earthly crown.

(1 Tamburlaine 2.7. 28-29, italics supplied)

Christopher Marlowe's "Tamburlaine Part One and Part Two," ed. Irving Ribner (Indianapolis: Odyssey, 1974).

Eager for military and political victory, even Shakespeare's saintly Richmond feels that through secularized "hope" like his, "Kings" are made "gods and meaner creatures kings" (R3 5.2.23). A king or other secular authority figure, though in some sense an earthly god and the Lord's viceroy, was subject to withering scrutiny and could easily be regarded under the icon that Hamlet applies to Claudius: an ape chewing upon his favorites (4.2.18), all of them below the fully human Hamlet. Similar mannerist turnabouts in Shakespeare are typical of the age; it is surprising how much in common beards have with whores, benefactors with malefactors, princes with apes:

man, proud man
Dress'd in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd
(His glassy essence), like an angry ape
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As makes the angels weep; who, with your spleens,
Would all themselves laugh mortal.

(*Measure for Measure*, 2.2.117-23)

When man reaches a state of stoic *apatheia*, writes William Baldwin, he becomes "An earthly God, . . . void of hope and hate,"⁴⁶ or if not a god, the presider over (according to the Stoics' egalitarian rhetoric) an inner "kingdom" (JC 2.1.68), for

Not ritches makes a kyng or high renowne,
.....
It is the mynde that onely makes a king.
.....
A kyng hee is that feareth nought at all
Eche man him selfe this kyngdome geeves at hand.

(Seneca, *Thyestes* II)⁴⁷

When commending the Stoical man Horatio in 3.2, Hamlet may not tap these ideas explicitly, but it is surely relevant that the Renaissance could articulate a belief that just as a man was created to be "king" over creation (Sir John Davies), so too, real kings could come closest to fulfilling all the potential of humanness (Juan de San Juan Huarte).⁴⁸

⁴⁶*Treatise of Moral Philosophy* (1547, 1564) cited by Soellner (n. 15 above), p. 24.

⁴⁷*Seneca His Tenne Tragedies* [1581], ed. Thomas Newton (1927; rpt. Bloomington, [1966]), pp. 66-67.

⁴⁸To Davies belongs the phrase "I know I am one of Nature's little kings" (as well as the statement that "There cannot be a creature more diuine, / Except [like thee] it

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Hamlet regards the democratizing title "man" as sufficient approbation for his stoical friend Horatio, whom Hamlet in 3.2 views as more manly than he, the crown prince. But Hamlet does play quibblingly with the concept of divinity when he lauds his mother's former "man" as an Hyperion, Jove, Mars, Mercury in their several superlative ways. King Hamlet possessed

A combination and a form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal
To give the world assurance of a man.
This was your husband.

(3.4.60-63)

Like Samuel Daniel, Hamlet here comes close to suggesting the Senecan moral commonplace, that man is not man "unless above himself he can erect himself."⁴⁹

Almost all of the play's many structurally important references to "man," its cognates, synonyms, and antonyms have elements of quibbling and would be appreciated for their rich implications regarding theme. It is impossible to comment on each passage in detail. However, two additional ones deserve special attention; the first because it is the most obvious of the play's many attempts to highlight the *man* motif, and the second because it represents the last of these attempts and is likely to suggest the play's final range of meanings.

The pun that emphasizes the man theme most strongly in *Hamlet* seems to occur in 5.1. There, the darkly satiric prince must for once play straight man to another clown. The latter impales him with what the rhetoricians termed *anteismus* (replying to a prior speaker with the same word used in a new sense), a subdivision of the very equivocation-full⁵⁰ figure of *antanaclasis*:

should be infinit"); cited in Baker (n. 16 above), p. 238. When Huarte (whose *Examen de Ingenios* was Englished in 1594) discussed those earthly gods, the kings, he implied that monarchic office tempers a man "physiologically and morally" (Soellner, n. 15 above, p. 114) and thus makes "possible the greatest wisdom and knowledge in the world."

⁴⁹Bush (n. 12 above), p. 85, in citing Daniel's famous phrase, links it to a *sententia* of Seneca's that Montaigne rejected.

⁵⁰Henry Peacham so characterized *antanaclasis*, according to Sr. Miriam Joseph *Rhetorician Shakespeare's Time* (1947; New York: Harbinger, 1962), p. 341. See also Brian Vickers on these figures and *polyptoton*, *paranomasia*, *agnominatio*, and *syllipsis*; "Shakespeare's Use of Rhetoric" in *A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, edd. Kenneth Muir and S. Schoenbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 88-89.

Ham. Whose grave's this, sirrah?

l Clo. Mine, sir.

Ham. What man dost thou dig it for?

1 Clo. For no man, sir.

Ham. What woman then?

1 Clo. For none neither . . .

One that was a woman, sir

Ham. . . . We must speak by the card,
or equivocation will undo us.

(118-48)

Elizabethan rhetorical texts are full of instances of “man” as a logical category with specific attributes.⁵¹ Educated spectators would have encountered examples, like the ones in the above scene, of “man” and its various “opposites”: the *mediate* opposition of even-Christen peasant toe to the heel of “great folk”; the *relative* opposition of “man” to “woman”; and the *immediate* opposition of “woman” to “dead” “woman.”⁵² As is frequent in Shakespeare, the entire scene prepares for these quibbles, for example with word play on Adam’s “arms,” the way a mān becomes a gentleman, and how self-murder is self-defense. We even hear the First Clown alert us by shifting awkwardly from a particular “she” to a generic “he” or “man”:

she drowned herself wittingly Here lies the water; good. Here stands the man; good. If the man go to this water . . . he goes

(12-17)

This deftly foreshadows the shifting quibbles in definition of the later interchange of prince and clown.

The final quibble, practically the last intellectually weighty one in this drama, universalizes the understanding of Hamlet's bookish "man," a Stoic attracted to ancient traditions of lieutenants' suicides.

⁶¹E.g., Thomas Blundeville defines "substance" by remarking that "a man full growne" is no "more a man then a childe newly borne" (Sr. Miriam Joseph, n. 50 above, p. 329), while Peacham defines the "accidents" of a "subject" with the following example of *man*: "What may we thinke of man, when we consider the heave burthen of his miserie, the weaknesse of his patience, the imperfection of his understanding, the conflicts of his counsels, the insatietie of his mind, the brevitie of his life, and the certaintie of his death." (Sr. Miriam Joseph, n. 50 above, p. 316).

²²Sr. Miriam Joseph, n. 50 above (p. 322) lists a fourth opposite as well: the *privatives*, as with "blind" versys "sighted."

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Hor. I am more an antique Roman than a Dane.
Here's yet some liquor left.

Ham. As thou'rt a man,
Give me the cup. Let go! By heaven I'll ha't!
(5.2.341-43)

Hamlet here gives lessons in masculinity to one to whom he had once psychologically played the woman. Seen as a retort to Horatio, Hamlet's use of the word "man" constitutes an elaborate quibble. It includes a rejection of his friend's putative role as pagan subordinate ("antique Roman"), and a reminder of his status as Hamlet's and the Christian God's "man." At least two more meanings seem also implied: that Horatio is to act not by local dispensation as Dane or Roman but in accordance with the dictates of nature and reason, as "man" *hic et ubique* should act; and that Horatio, avoiding suicide and absenting himself from felicity a while longer, must further perfect his manhood in suffering. For just as "The sailor groweth to be a Pilote amongst Tempests and storms," Guillaume du Vair writes, so "man becomes not man indeed, that is constant and courageous, but in adversity."⁵³

One irony among many in the conclusion is a movement to replace "man" with terms of more specifically social connotation. Significantly, most uses of the word "gentleman" and its cognates occur in the last quarter of this drama. No one, after Hamlet's death, manipulates and appreciates the word "man" as he has done. Perhaps in the interest of conventionally minded groundlings, Shakespeare makes Hamlet's personal and political heirs, Horatio and Fortinbras, translate the hero's manliness into the most conventional social terms. To these eulogists, he is a crowned saint ascending to his heavenly "rest"; he is courageous as a "soldier" in the "field," a "prince" likely to have proved a most "royal" king. To some in the audience, alert to the author's universalizing quibbles on "man," this formulation must have marked an awkwardly new direction, a resort to a half-open closure whose indeterminacy is part of the play's mannerist technique. The wiser sort would not long be deflected by this device from the play's fundamental, all-important but finally unanswerable question: What is a man?

⁵³ *A Buckler Against Adversitie* (tr. Thomas James, 1598, p. 91), cited by Douglas L. Peterson, *Time, Tide and Tempest* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1973), p. 47.

Hamlet and Oedipus Today: Jones and Lacan

KEITH FLEMING

Has Ernest Jones been deposed by Jacques Lacan? Leaving aside the general upsurge of interest in Lacan in recent years, there is no doubt that ever since "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*" was made available in translation by *Yale French Studies* in 1977, increasing attention has been paid to Lacan's view of *Hamlet*. Correspondingly, interest in *Hamlet and Oedipus* appears to have declined. William Kerrigan, in a recent article, even claims to detect in Lacan's study a deliberate attempt to bring Jones's reign to an end. Lacan, he declares, is disputing "the territory of literary psychoanalysis ruled by Ernest Jones" and, indeed, "staging a revenge play in the theatre of psychoanalytic thought."¹

If *Hamlet and Oedipus* no longer has the position of pre-eminence it once had in the field, there are, of course, other factors to be considered apart from the Lacan translation. We have of late been offered a variety of alternative psychoanalytical interpretations, and, in fact, the year of the Lacan translation also saw the publication of Avi Erlich's full-length critical study, *Hamlet's Absent Father*, with its direct assault upon the authority of Jones's explanation of Hamlet's delay.

The view that I wish to develop here is that the explanation of Hamlet's delay put forward in *Hamlet and Oedipus*, while admittedly not satisfactory as it stands, can be revised in such a way as to meet the kind of criticism that Erlich advances, and that it will then become assimilable within a wider Lacanian perspective. I believe that it is important to follow the direction taken by Lacan; but, since Lacan himself developed his psychoanalytical theory less by rejecting Freud's findings than by inserting them in a different problematic, I see no reason why the argument of *Hamlet and Oedipus*, suitably revised, should not undergo a similar process of adaptation. What is more, I hope to show that Lacan's interpretation needs to be filled out—and even, in certain respects, corrected—with Jones's help.

I will begin, then, by re-examining *Hamlet and Oedipus* in the context of the criticisms made by Erlich, who launches his case by going back to the comments by Freud on *Hamlet* in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and

¹William Kerrigan, "Psychoanalysis Unbound," *New Literary History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Autumn 1980), 205.

elsewhere. Erlich reminds us that Freud's seminal explanation of Hamlet's delay hinges on the claim that in the unconscious mind of every man there persists a wish first formed in childhood to kill his father and marry his own mother. Applying this generalisation to *Hamlet*, Freud argues that since Claudius kills Hamlet's father and marries Hamlet's mother, it follows that if Hamlet accepts that Claudius deserves to be punished for this by being killed in turn, he must logically accept, at an unconscious level, that he, too, deserves to be similarly punished for his identical wish, because—in the unconscious—wishes and deeds are indistinguishable. Hamlet is therefore led to turn his reproaches against Claudius back upon himself and to be preoccupied by a sense not of Claudius's guilt but of his own.

Erlich does not see this as a valid argument. He says:

It seems just as logical to argue that because Hamlet has identified with Claudius, his conscience, far from being inhibited, must punish Claudius. If Hamlet feels guilty for wishing to commit Claudius' crime, why not mitigate that guilt by killing Claudius? This would make the identification with Claudius a successful defence mechanism, in that the conflict between wish and inhibition would be resolved in the outer world without damage to the self.²

Since Ernest Jones makes use of a very similar argument to Freud's, his account is, in Erlich's view, open to just as damaging an objection. Erlich cites the key passage in *Hamlet and Oedipus* concerning Hamlet's identification with Claudius, which runs as follows:

His own 'evil' prevents him from completely denouncing his uncle's, and in continuing to 'repress' the former he must strive to ignore, to condone, and if possible even to forget the latter; *his moral fate is bound up with his uncle's for good or ill*. In reality his uncle incorporates the deepest and most buried part of his own personality, so that he cannot kill him without killing himself.³

Upon this Erlich comments:

It is probably true that Hamlet's "uncle incorporates the deepest and most buried part of his own personality," but it is not true that killing that projected part of his personality is tantamount to "killing himself." It is not self-evident that he should "strive to ignore" his uncle's crime;

²Avi Erlich, *Hamlet's Absent Father* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 21.

³Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1949), p. 88. (Jones's emphasis).

he could punish his uncle and thereby punish that aspect of himself which he repudiates, thus sparing himself much guilt. Again, he delays not because he identifies with Claudius but in spite of his identification; this idea eludes Jones not because it is absent from his psychology, but because he too is blinded by Freud's misleading hunch. Such is the power of masters over disciples (p. 24).

Erlich's fundamental point is that Hamlet's delay cannot be explained simply by an appeal to the most general of all properties of Oedipus complexes. Ernest Jones looks for an explanation in such general terms because for him the Oedipus complex of Hamlet as a child is something about which the play itself gives no direct information. This, for Erlich, is where Jones goes most seriously astray: he fails to realise that Hamlet's oedipal feelings are *in* the play, not outside it.

The force of Erlich's criticisms has to be admitted. Jones does talk as if we had to ascribe certain childhood experiences to Hamlet purely on the evidence of his adult behaviour. However, there is one chapter in *Hamlet and Oedipus* in which Jones employs a quite different line of argument, the chapter in which he investigates the Hamlet legend as myth. Here, he bases his investigation on the principle that the themes of myths are derived from unconscious infantile fantasies; and he maintains that the more a myth is elaborated, the more it becomes subject to repressive forces that distort its underlying meaning. In fact, he likens myths to dreams in that their production involves certain mechanisms designed to transform their latent content into a more acceptable form, and he comments:

The most interesting of these mechanisms of myth formation is that known as 'decomposition', which is the opposite of the 'condensation' so characteristic of dreams. Whereas in the latter process attributes of several individuals are fused together in the creation of one figure . . . in the former process various attributes of a given individual are disunited and several other individuals are invented, each endowed with one group of the original attributes (p. 131).

Applying this conception of myth to the Hamlet legend, Jones argues that the latent content of the Hamlet legend as originally presented is centrally concerned with a son who loves his father and yet wants to kill him—the typical oedipal situation. The mechanism of decomposition, however, operates to distort the real relationship here, and what the manifest content of the myth insists is that the son feels nothing but love for his father and that it is someone else altogether—the wicked uncle—who desires the father's death. To rediscover the latent content, we have

to put back together the loving son and the son's murderous uncle so as to recompose the real loving, yet murderous, son.

This, though, is not the only form that decomposition of the oedipal feelings takes. The loved and hated father is also decomposed into a loved father and a hated father. And who better fitted to be the hated father than the wicked uncle? When Claudius kills King Hamlet, he (Claudius) is the murderous son acting out his wish; when Claudius is killed, he is the hated father overcome by the son. We are no longer on the firm ground of Jones's main line of interpretation where Claudius is to be seen quite simply as Hamlet's uncle. Now Claudius is not an uncle at all, but aspects of the decomposed son and decomposed father combined.

Jones argues for a similar analysis of the Polonius family. Polonius, too, is one aspect of the decomposed father. He is the father as "senile babbler" and "prying busybody." And Jones introduces here the important concept of "distance." Latent content that cannot be allowed to surface in too close a connection with the original oedipal relations may be permitted to do so at one or two removes, and this is the case with Polonius.

Because of his greater distance from the original Oedipus situation, not being a member of the royal family, he draws on to himself the son-hero's undisguised dislike, untempered by any doubts or conflicts, and Hamlet finds it possible to kill him without remorse (p. 135).

Polonius plays father to Hamlet as son in a further oedipal role. He denies Ophelia to him, just as Claudius takes away Gertrude. And here the father is still further decomposed. Laertes, according to Jones, is no less the denying father than Polonius. He, too, warns Ophelia against Hamlet, and his attitude towards her is caring and protective in a way that is indistinguishable from that of Polonius. On the other hand, Laertes is later in the play clearly the son-hero who avenges the death of his father. Jones observes:

From this point of view we reach the interesting conclusion that Laertes and Claudius are psychological and mythological equivalents or duplicates. Each represents aspects of both generations, the father who is to be killed and the revolutionary murderous son, thus differing from Polonius, the Ghost, and the elder Hamlet himself, who are all pure father-figures (pp. 139-40).

This last claim is one that I shall be disputing. While wanting to make use of Jones's concept of decomposition, I shall be arguing that the elder Hamlet and the Ghost are just as much representations of the son as of the father. However, I have a more general criticism of Jones's analysis to

make: perceptive as it is, it does not bring together its two different lines of argument in any coherent way. Jones does not argue for any specific connection between the latent content revealed by the second form of analysis and the childhood Oedipus complex that Hamlet is deduced to have according to the primary line of argument.

Yet Jones does insist that Hamlet's conflict has to be an echo of a similar conflict in Shakespeare himself:

It was a living person who imagined the figure of Hamlet with his behaviour, his reflections, and his emotions. The whole came from somewhere within Shakespeare's mind, and evidently from the inmost depths of that mind (p. 101).

This anticipates Erlich's claim that Hamlet's imagined Oedipus complex is derived from Shakespeare's real Oedipus complex, and it is surprising that Jones does not reason from this to the possibility that under all the decompositions of the play distorting the latent content there lies an account of that very same Oedipus complex that determines the imagined figure of Hamlet with his behaviour, his reflections and his emotions; and that the childhood Oedipus complex that can explain Hamlet's behaviour does not lie outside the play but *inside* it—under the decomposition. I shall now develop Ernest Jones's second line of argument in this direction that he himself ignored.

Jones himself singles out as the deepest source of conflict between father and son "the resentment felt by a boy towards his father when the latter disturbs, as he necessarily must, his enjoyment of his mother's exclusive affections" (p. 75). In this formulation of the oedipal conflict, Jones rightly focuses on the son feeling that it is not he who is disturbing a prior intimacy between his mother and father, but that, on the contrary, it is his father who is coming between him and his mother, undermining *their* firmly established love for each other. In Lacanian terms, the dual relationship between the child and the mother, characterised by the child's desire of the mother, suffers the intervention of the father, who deprives the child of the object of his desire.

If we approach the play with this in mind, what must strike us is that the two people whose established love for each other is most profoundly affected by an intruder are King Hamlet and Gertrude. In line, then, with Jones's argument that, in terms of decomposition, Claudius is both son and father, we should be ready to see King Hamlet, too, as an element of the decomposed son as well as of the father. In this respect, his relation to Prince Hamlet at the level of latent content is that he is the son who thinks of himself as enjoying the mother's exclusive affection and then experiences the trauma of losing that affection; while Prince Hamlet in grief

over the death of King Hamlet and Gertrude's marriage to Claudius is the son who is left mourning the passing of his former self and brooding resentfully over the success of Claudius, the father who has taken the place he covets, and who has done so with universal support.

In Hamlet's first soliloquy, it is, in fact, possible to detect the intense oedipal feelings of the son towards the mother; and they are manifest in King Hamlet, not in Prince Hamlet. It is the earlier self of the decomposed son that is recalled as having been so much in love with the mother,

That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly.

(1.2.141-142)

It is that earlier son, too, that is recalled as having had his love returned with equal ardour:

Why, she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on.

(1.2.143-145)

The return of the dead King in the form of the Ghost is, as has often been pointed out, essentially a return of the repressed; and, in terms of the decomposed son split into King Hamlet and Prince Hamlet respectively, it is the pressing for admission into the field of thought of the son trying hard to forget his oedipal trauma of just those terrible truths he has partially succeeded in repressing. The son trying to forget the source of his misery is clear in the first soliloquy, with its exclamations: "Must I remember?" and "Let me not think on't." Against this effort to repress all knowledge of the painful oedipal experience is its insistent pressure to be acknowledged, summed up in the Ghost's chilling command: "Remember me."

It is here that the decomposition of the son takes on a special significance as a key to interpretation of the play. What is peculiar to *Hamlet*, as distinct from other plays of Shakespeare equally open to interpretation in terms of an oedipal crisis, is that its unconscious content centres on the very act of repression itself. From this point of view, we need specifically to see the son as decomposed into the self as represser and the self as repressed.

The very first scene of the play introduces this struggle in the son between repression and the return of the repressed. Since, as Jones points out, unconscious content can gain expression more easily at a distance, it is here not Hamlet as son who is engaged in the struggle, but the more distant representations of the repressing son—Horatio, Bernardo,

and Marcellus. The initial defence against recognition of what has been repressed is a flat denial that any such unconscious content can possibly exist. This is Horatio's reaction towards the Ghost which the others claim to have seen.

Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
And will not let belief take hold of him
Touching this dreaded sight.

(1.1.23-25)

The inner conflict in the son between his knowledge that the repressed self does exist and his resolution to deny that it does is well caught in Bernardo's:

Let us once again assail your ears,
That are so fortified against our story,

(1.1.31-32)

and the defence of denial is shown as finally having to yield to the importunate oedipal feelings when they insist on recognition. With the appearance of the Ghost, Horatio's resistance crumbles:

Before my God, I might not this believe
Without the sensible and true avouch
Of mine own eyes.

(1.1.56-58)

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that we are examining the *latent* content. Both the pressure for acknowledgement of the oedipal feelings and the resistance to that pressure are recorded in this scene as taking place at an *unconscious* level. The breaking-down of one of the son's defences is not to be mistaken for a break-through of the repressed oedipal feelings into *consciousness*. The level of consciousness is the level of the manifest content, and the manifest content has nothing to say about the return of the repressed: it is concerned only with the return of a *Ghost*. The defence-mechanism displayed in action here is an unconscious mechanism, and what the latent content is revealing is a dynamic conflict at an unconscious level between the son's mechanisms of defence and the repressed feelings that will not be denied.

The play records this conflict in its latent content scene by scene, revealing one after another different facets of an oedipal crisis and the defences that are enlisted to deal with it. Already in the second scene the latent content is in close touch with this oedipal crisis, recording part of the immediate aftermath of the son's loss of the mother to the father. In the third scene, we are taken back further to part of the situation that actually

brings about that loss. Jones correctly identifies Laertes and Polonius here as twin father-figures, with Ophelia as the mother and Hamlet the son. Again, Jones has noted the way in which the distance of Polonius and his family from the central oedipal triad of Hamlet, Gertrude and Claudius facilitates the expression of what would otherwise remain repressed. The father is now shown as undervaluing the love of the son for the mother and as capitalising on the sexual component of the oedipal feelings with the aim of making them an excuse for taking the mother away from the son. First Laertes, as father, warns Ophelia, as mother:

For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favour,
Hold it a fashion, and a toy in blood.

(1.3.5-6)

Then Polonius takes up the theme:

I do know
When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul
Lends the tongue vows . . .

Do not believe his vows: for they are brokers,
Not of that dye which their investments show,
But mere implorators of unholy suits.

(1.3.115-129)

The mother must end this relationship with the son, and she does.

The final scenes of the First Act present Hamlet's personal encounter with the Ghost, in the course of which he learns of the dreadful torments the Ghost suffers:

My hour is almost come,
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself.

(1.5.2-4)

It is precisely because the oedipal crisis causes the son intolerable pain that he is driven to try to repress all knowledge of it. The Ghost now insists upon the repressing son's recognition of the oedipal suffering. Yet the return of the repressed must not go too far, for fear that such a burden of knowledge would be more than flesh and blood could stand:

But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood

But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood.

(1.5.13-22)

What the Ghost can reveal, though, is the active part played by Claudius, as father, in the ending of the son's oedipal relationship with the mother.

That incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts—
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce:—won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.

(1.5.42-46)

This revelation itself, however, is merely a prelude to the crucial disclosure. The father is now directly accused of the murder of the son's former self, and the duty is imposed upon the surviving self to take his revenge by killing the father.

Accusation and command here go to the heart of the oedipal crisis. The accusation that the father has killed the son implies more than just that the father has made the son relinquish his claim on the mother: it implies that the son's *ability* to possess the mother has been destroyed by the father—that is, it implies that the father has castrated the son.

Erlich makes much of the castration-theme in *Hamlet*, but he uses it primarily to support his argument about the weakness of the father. Writing of the Ghost's account of his murder by Claudius, he quotes the lines:

Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatched,
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,

(1.5.74-76)

and he comments: "The Ghost means 'blossoms of my sin' in an abstract sense, but he might also be implying that he was 'cut off' in the sexual act, castrated when the flesh blossoms. . . . King Hamlet is weak and vacant in all senses of the word. He is not all there" (pp. 87-88). Erlich's interpretation of this specific passage in isolation is, he admits, uncertain, but he draws together a large number of similar references which reinforce one another sufficiently to make his interpretation a cogent one. What he does not see, however, is that the passages he cites are just as much about the son's castration as about the father's.

When the Ghost calls upon Hamlet to "revenge his foul and most unnatural murder," what is being asked of the surviving self of the son is to

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perform precisely the action upon which his original oedipal conflict is centred—he is to kill his father—and it was just for such an attempted act on his part that the father castrated him. The Ghost, in freeing these harrowing oedipal feelings from their “prison-house” in the unconscious, does revive in the surviving self of the son the wish to kill the father—but he revives at the same time all the terror of the son’s castration. And although the son’s immediate response is to resolve to fulfil this deep-rooted wish, and not to repress it again,

Remember thee?

Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe,

(1.5.95-97)

the wish is so bound up with the unendurable pain of the oedipal crisis and the son’s sense of powerlessness—the repeated phrase “poor ghost” takes in both the pain and the powerlessness—that the resolution is impossible to keep. The son *has* to defend himself against the terrible knowledge forced upon him. And he does so in two ways: first, by re-repressing it as far as he can; and, secondly, by transforming it into the symptoms of a neurosis. Both these defence-mechanisms are actually demonstrated in the latent content of the final scene of the First Act.

The Act began with an attack upon the defences of the repressing son—Horatio and his fellow-watchers—by the repressed son, the Ghost. It ends with an attempt at re-establishing the defences, with Horatio and Marcellus again involved. This attempt to re-repress what the Ghost has revealed is frantic and insistent:

Never make known what you have seen tonight.

My lord, we will not.

Nay, but swear’t.

In faith, my lord, not I.

Nor I, my lord, in faith.

Upon my sword.

We have sworn, my lord, already.

Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

.

Propose the oath, my lord.

Never to speak of this that you have seen.

Swear by my sword . . .

.

And lay your hands again upon my sword.

Swear by my sword

Never to speak of this that you have heard.

(1.5.144-160)

The ghost "beneath" also insists upon this repression, for the defence-mechanisms are not simply directed against the oedipal feelings; they to some extent spring from them. Consider, for example, the way in which the Ghost forbids Hamlet to indulge his wish for revenge upon his mother:

Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught.

(1.5.85-86)

Just as the surviving self of the son is momentarily overwhelmed by the return of the repressed and allies himself with the oedipal feelings, so the recoil from this too perilous renewal of the oedipal conflict with the father affects both selves together. The drive to re-repress the oedipal crisis is profound.

Yet the return of the repressed has been too compelling to be repressed without a continuing struggle. The son therefore enlists a further defence-mechanism—the displacement of the oedipal feelings into bizarre, apparently "irrational" behaviour. Hamlet indicates his intention to act strangely or oddly,

As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on,

(1.5.171-172)

and in the next scene Ophelia recounts his appearing before her:

Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other;
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors.

(2.1.81-84)

The shock of the Ghost's revelation is apparent here—Hamlet is shown as marked by the Ghost's very own secret horrific knowledge—but the knowledge has been, as it were, contained. The oedipal conflict with the father with its dual components of the wish to kill the father and the punishment by castration is minimised. There are indeed references to the son's death and castration:

He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
That it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being;

(2.1.94-96)

but their frame of reference is simply the loss of the mother's love. Polonius draws just the conclusion that is wanted, putting it to Ophelia for

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confirmation: "Mad for thy love?" The son's defence-mechanism of "madness" here allows him to repress the wish to kill the father and to limit the oedipal feelings to the more manageable grief at the mother's withdrawal of her affection.

What follows in the succeeding scenes of the play is attempt after attempt to break through the son's defences. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are summoned in the hope that they might "glean from Hamlet whether aught . . . unknown afflicts him thus"; Polonius "boards" Hamlet; Ophelia is "loosed" to him while Claudius and Polonius eavesdrop on their conversation. Hamlet's energies are spent defending himself from all their prying and spying, and the resolute fight he puts up to protect his secret shows the tenacity of the son's defences. He will not allow the heart of the oedipal mystery to be plucked out if he can by any means protect it. His aim is to keep far from consciousness all thought of the oedipal imperative to kill his father.

The latent content of the first part of the play thus centres on the return of the repressed wish to kill the father and a subsequent defensive campaign resolutely aimed at re-repressing this wish. Jones's concept of decomposition has made it possible to derive this latent content from the manifest content in a way that to a limited extent resembles dream-interpretation. However, unlike the manifest content of a dream, the manifest content of the play has a significance of its own; and now that the son's unconscious preoccupation with the re-repression of the oedipal wish has been established, this preoccupation has to be related to what happens in *Hamlet* at a conscious level.

We must return to the manifest content and, while still seeing Hamlet as the son, change back to seeing Claudius once again as Hamlet's uncle. The relationship we now find is that at the very same time that on its surface level the play is unfolding the circumstances which lead to the call by the father for the son to kill his uncle, the latent content of the play is presenting the movement towards release from repression of the son's wish to kill the father. As soon as, on the conscious level, the son is made to think of killing the man who has killed his father and married his mother, the oedipal wish of the son is unconsciously revived. The very speeches of the Ghost that command Hamlet to take revenge on his uncle carry at an unconscious level the son's death-wish against the father. They also, however, reveal its terrifying consequences, and set in motion the son's unconscious re-repression of this wish. The correlative of this re-repression on the conscious level is the son's "forgetting" of the command to kill the uncle—that is, the correlative is Hamlet's delay.

Ernest Jones, in the passage from *Hamlet and Oedipus* quoted by Erlich, attributes the delay to Hamlet's identification of himself with his

uncle. The text shows Hamlet's crucial association to be one between killing his uncle and killing his father. Just this association, though, is made by Ernest Jones in *Hamlet and Oedipus* in a passage not quoted by Erlich, which runs:

The call of duty to kill his stepfather cannot be obeyed because it links itself with the unconscious call of his nature to kill his mother's husband, whether this be the first or the second; the absolute 'repression' of the former impulse [Jones means the call to kill the *first* husband] involves the inner prohibition of the latter also (p. 90).

This passage could well serve as a summary of the interpretation which I have just developed. Jones's only mistake is to present his account of the unconscious source of Hamlet's delay as a pure deduction from Hamlet's adult behaviour. Erlich justifiably questions the logic of Jones's central argument; but in the revision of Jones's interpretation that I have put forward, it is not a matter of logic but of appealing to the text, not a matter of Hamlet's identification with Claudius, but of his identification of Claudius with his father. In this revised form, Ernest Jones's explanation of Hamlet's delay is essentially correct.

We must now consider what implications this conclusion has with regard to Lacan's interpretation of *Hamlet*, which explains Hamlet's delay in very different terms. Lacan's emphasis is on "the extent to which the play is dominated by the Mother as Other (Autre), i.e. the primordial subject of the demand (la demande)." Hamlet's delay in killing Claudius—the flagging of "his zeal with respect to an act that he . . . longs to carry out"⁴ is, on this basis, argued by Lacan to be a consequence of his being so dependent upon the Mother that he is ruled by what she desires: he desires her desire. It follows that since *she* cannot choose between King Hamlet and Claudius, *he* cannot choose, either.

This emphasis of Lacan's upon the dominance of the Mother in *Hamlet* is scrupulously faithful to the text. Jones's interpretation, in contrast, has been persistently criticised for its failure to do justice to this quality of the play, much as Jones tried in *Hamlet and Oedipus* to remedy precisely this weakness of earlier versions of his interpretation. Yet Jones is right about the delay. How, then, are the two interpretations to be reconciled?

Our starting-point has to be the need for Lacan's interpretation to assimilate Jones's explanation of the delay. The evidence of the text is here quite clear. The beginning of the Second Act of the play reveals that Hamlet is already delaying his revenge. The cause of that delay is given

⁴Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," *Yale French Studies*, Nos. 55-56 (1977), 12-13.

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just where it might be expected—in the last scene of the First Act. It is there that the re-repression of the wish to kill the father takes place, and it takes place in panic-stricken haste. Hamlet's delay as it is recorded there is not the delay of someone who cannot choose between two alternatives, but of someone for whom a particular course of action is—at an unconscious level—too terrifying in its consequences to be allowed to materialize. It is for this reason that his defence-mechanisms have to come into operation. Those defence-mechanisms are in the text and they are *necessary*. It is clear, therefore, that Hamlet's situation is not *simply* that of Buridan's ass, one in which he cannot *choose*, for this would be a situation in which defence-mechanisms had no place. We have to start from the repressed wish to kill the father.

Lacan does not deny the significance of this wish. He acknowledges that *Hamlet* is an Oedipal drama, and that its basis is a crime—the primal murder. He believes, though, that interpretation of a play like *Oedipus* or *Hamlet* has to centre not on the killing of the father, but on what happens to the son as a result, his punishment by castration:

The most important thing is punishment, sanction, castration—the hidden key to the humanisation of sexuality, the key with which we are accustomed by our experience to make the accidents of the evolution of desire fall into place (p. 43).

Focusing on the son's castration, Lacan develops his interpretation of *Hamlet* in terms of desire of the Mother because he detects in *Hamlet* the son's attempt to compensate for the loss of the phallus by substituting the Mother as the object of desire. However, in spite of this retreat to the Mother, the son is obviously still engaged in the oedipal relationship with the symbolic Father, so that an alternative direction for interpretation is to focus on the son's castration in relation to his submission to the Father. To do this is to explore further the release and re-repression of the wish to kill the father that has been shown to be so central to the action of the play.

This alternative line of interpretation, far from taking us away from Lacan, actually leads to a clear recognition of the immense fruitfulness of his form of interpretation of *Hamlet* compared with that of Jones. The great limitation of Jones's approach is that it has so little direct connection with what really *matters* in *Hamlet*. This is why literary critics have so determinedly turned their backs upon Jones. In "*Hamlet*, Ernest Jones, and the Critics," Howard Livingston looks at a number of attacks by literary critics upon Jones, and attempts to show how misdirected they are. However, he does not grasp the real nature of their grievance, as can be seen from his reaction to Francis Fergusson's remark in *The Idea of a*

Theatre that "the Oedipus complex does not account for the fact that Hamlet, besides being a son, is also a dispossessed Prince, nor that Claudius, besides being a father symbol, is also the actual ruler of the state." Livingston takes this to be a claim that "Hamlet's distress is caused by his view of himself as the rightful King of Denmark,"⁵ whereas the real thrust of Fergusson's criticism of Jones lies in its exposure of Jones's inability to include in the scope of his analysis anything but familial relationships in spite of the obvious fact that *Hamlet* is in a crucial sense about *societal* relationships.

This is, indeed, a crippling weakness in Jones's problematic that makes it essentially inadequate in the sphere of literary criticism. Lacan's problematic, however, allows a consideration of just this level of meaning in *Hamlet* upon which Fergusson rightly insists criticism must be able to dwell. It does so because it makes a link between the oedipal period as a time during which the son comes to submit to the symbolic Father, and the oedipal period as a time when the son's acquisition of language brings him to participate in the discourse of the Other. The son can only participate in this discourse through undergoing a symbolic castration that signifies his submission to the Law of the Other, but the effect of the Oedipus is to make him, on this symbolic level, identify the Law with the Father. Submission to the Law and submission to the Father are therefore one. Yet the Law of the Father to which the son submits takes him beyond the familial sphere; for it is the Law of the society as contained in language.

If we return to the confrontation between Hamlet and the Ghost, we can see how this formulation makes it possible for a Lacanian interpretation of *Hamlet* to meet Fergusson's criticisms where Jones's interpretation is found wanting. Using Jones's problematic, we cannot proceed beyond the claim that, when the Ghost commands Hamlet to revenge his murder, the command is, at an unconscious level, the command to kill the father. If, however, we go over to Lacan's problematic, what the command is seen to entail is a total rejection of the Law of the Father.

Hamlet's immediate response to the Ghost's command is, in fact, to dissociate himself as far as humanly possible from the discourse of the Other:

Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there;
And thy commandment all alone shall live

⁵Howard Livingston, "Hamlet, Ernest Jones, and the Critics," *Hamlet Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Summer 1980), 28.

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Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd with baser matter.

(1.5.98-104)

This dissociation is a dissociation from just that conception of "the order of things" that is unquestionably accepted by Laertes and Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and all the rest who support the rule of Claudius—the Law of the Father. Laertes's homage to Claudius and his worldly-wise advice to Ophelia are marked in every respect by submission to the social mores. Even his anger with Claudius at Polonius's death is a socially approved response, and when he is confronted by Hamlet at Ophelia's funeral, it is a confrontation between conventional grief and a mourning that despises convention.

Again, Polonius, with his injunction to Laertes:

And these few precepts in thy memory
Look thou character,

(1.3.58-59)

is a "tedious old fool" attempting to inscribe within the memory just those "trivial fond records" and "saws of books" that Hamlet is attempting to erase; while Rosencrantz is drawing reverently upon the same Law of the Other when he stresses the peril of interference with the established course of social organisation:

The cease of majesty
Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw
What's near it with it; it is a massy wheel,
Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount,
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
Are mortised and adjoin'd; which, when it falls,
Each small annexment, petty consequence,
Attends the boisterous ruin.

(3.3.15-27)

We are here on ground well mapped out by literary critics from E.M.W. Tillyard onwards, and that is just the point: Lacanian interpretation can encompass orthodox literary criticism of this kind. From a Lacanian point of view, if the play forces us to share Hamlet's critical standpoint and does not allow us wholeheartedly to believe in the code of honour that guides Fortinbras and Laertes any more than in the divinity that is supposed to hedge Claudius, and if we are made to feel that corruption and intrigue are rotting the moral and political fabric of Hamlet's society, it is because the discourse of the Other to which Shakespeare makes Hamlet party contains its own insistent doubts about the Law.

Yet, in *Hamlet*, these doubts are only for one brief moment permitted to constitute a radical challenge to the Law. The fear of real castration that drives the son to re-repress his wish to kill the father is bound up with a willingness to accept a symbolic castration rather than to live without the Law, and it drives the son just as irresistibly to renege on his vow to erase the Law from the tables of his memory as on his vow to kill the father. He has to repress the dangerous questioning of the validity of the Law that underlies the Ghost's revelation that Claudius, the Father who is the Law, is himself a Law-breaker.

Lacan's analysis of Hamlet's delay as an effect of his inability to choose between King Hamlet and Claudius, though in itself quite accurate, can now be recognised as operating at a different level. Expressed in terms of societal relations, what Lacan is identifying is an inability on Hamlet's part to choose between the old society under the Law of King Hamlet and the new society under the Law of Claudius. The discourse of the Other in which Hamlet participates is a discourse in which the very basis of the Law is changing.

Hamlet might appear to choose the old society:

See what a grace was seated on this brow;
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;
(3.4.55-57)

but the old society has, in fact, shown itself to be too weak to survive. As Erlich argues, *Hamlet* is full of weak fathers. Claudius, for all his unattractiveness, has strength—a strength sufficient to preserve his subjects from the serious threats posed by the rebellious actions of sons like Fortinbras and Laertes. Lacan is, on this level, right. Hamlet is indeed held motionless between the contrary pulls of the splendour of the old society and the power of the new; and the dilemma recorded here is a dilemma that exists at the unconscious level of the discourse of the Other, which is profoundly divided against itself.

For all this, though, there is an even deeper force at work. Shakespeare's age has to be seen not simply as a transitional age from one Law to another, as it is when we talk of it in terms of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. It has to be seen as an age which saw the development of a profound questioning of patriarchal authority in the moral, political and spiritual spheres. Only through the discourse of the Other could this questioning be expressed: but the questioning struck at the very basis of the Law of the Other, at the Father as the Law.

Here it is not a matter of choosing between two fathers. The son's unconscious repression of any radical questioning of the Law lest it bring in

its wake just that state of moral and political lawlessness that Hobbes was later to characterise as the "war of all against all" involves a repression of the wish to kill the father at a level at which there can be no distinction between one father and another. In *Hamlet* there is inscribed both the insistence of this questioning to the point at which it threatens to repeal altogether the Law of the Other and the panic-stricken recoil which then takes place at the thought of so cataclysmic a course.

Hamlet can allow himself to be tirelessly critical of Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Laertes, Ophelia and the rest, but, as Lacan acutely points out, he constantly puts himself at their beck and call, and even at the end, when the bout of fencing with Laertes is proposed to him,

he seems just to lie down and roll over, one more time 'If it please his majesty, it is the breathing time of day with me. Let the foils be brought, the gentleman willing, and the King hold his purpose, I will win for him and I can' (p. 30).

Hamlet, as Lacan says, accepts everything and allows himself to be suspended in the time of the Other; but he does this essentially because the alternative is to destroy the Law of the Other, and the very thought of such an alternative harrows up the soul and freezes the blood. Indeed, in this respect, it is perfectly true that Hamlet cannot destroy the Law or the Father without destroying himself.

It is the merit of Jones's interpretation of *Hamlet* that it helps us to recognise that in the release and the re-repression of the wish to kill the father lies the key to an understanding of this deeper meaning of the play. We have, though, to insert Jones's argument within a Lacanian problematic in order to use it to effect. It is evident, then, that the proper relationship to see between Jones's interpretation of *Hamlet* and Lacan's is not one of rivalry but one of mutual support. Together, Jones and Lacan allow us to appreciate the profound level at which Shakespeare recorded the resistance of his age to its own insistent questionings of the Law.

Hamlet As Fool

MICHAEL GRAVES

In his chapter "The Antic Disposition" Levin suggests brilliantly but briefly Hamlet's links to the Shakespearean, the Erasmian, and the Holbeinian fool.¹ The prince's parallels to these fools can provide an interesting extended taxonomy. But Levin focuses more on Hamlet as Socratic ironist than on Hamlet as fool. It is a commonplace of *Hamlet* criticism that the prince dons his antic disposition to protect himself while venting the wrath he feels towards the hypocrisy of Claudius and the court. Hamlet's resemblances to a figure of fun have been noted by several commentators. Johnson wrote that "the pretended madness of Hamlet causes much mirth."² Gilbert Murray points out that "Hamlet's actual language is at times exactly that of the regular Shakespearean fool."³ However, he neither elaborates on his insight nor refers the curious reader to other sources. Hamlet knows that, as Erasmus's Folly asserts, "To pretend to be a fool is sometimes the height of wisdom."⁴ When he assumes his antic disguise, Hamlet is also aware of the wisdom of Touchstone. Indeed, he adapts to his purpose the paradox of Touchstone: "The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool."⁵ Under the cloak of his oxymoronic madness, Hamlet shows himself to be wise to the ways of the world of Claudius and his court. Pretending to be mad, the prince plays the rôle of fool and points up to the audience the folly and vice of the king and the court.

¹Harry Levin, *The Question of Hamlet* (1959; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

²Samuel Johnson, ed. *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (London: 1765), VIII, 311.

³Gilbert Murray, *The Classical Tradition in Poetry* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1968), p. 213. See also John Baley, *Shakespeare and Tragedy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 170, who speaks of Hamlet's "alarming candour as evident as a fool's."

⁴Desiderius Erasmus, *Moriae Encomium*, trans. Leonard F. Dean (New York: Hendricks House, 1969), p. 116.; typed in text as *Mor*. The influence of Erasmus's book on Shakespeare's dramatic art has been generally recognized. Frank McCombie gives a good summary of studies of Erasmus's influence on Shakespeare in his essay "Hamlet and the 'Moriae Encomium,'" in *Shakespeare Survey*, ed. Kenneth Muir, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), vol. 27, pp. 59-69.

⁵"As You Like It," 5.1.31-32, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). All references to the plays of Shakespeare are from this edition.

Levin observes that Hamlet plays the fool in "the grand Erasmian manner. . . . In dissembling, in counterfeiting madness, in playing his antic part, he exemplifies the humanistic tradition of the wise fool The fool's traditional function has been to demonstrate that the other person, whatever his pretensions to wit may be, is likewise a fool; their dialectic, be it erratic or subtle, terminates in *tu quoque*" (pp. 125, 82, 123). Hamlet's pointedly foolish remarks, which allow him to vent his deeply felt hostility, parallel the fool's traditional function. The surface of his remarks seems insane but the hidden meanings expose the hypocrisy of the court. To cite Polonius: "How pregnant sometimes his replies are" (2.2 208-9). Indeed, to Shakespeare's audience, Hamlet's replies were bursting with meaning.

Although Hamlet's fooling does resemble the role playing of Folly, the ironic persona of Erasmus's *Moriae Encomium*, it may be more precise to assert that Hamlet plays the fool in a grand Shakespearean way.⁶ As we shall see, Hamlet does parallel Erasmus's goddess, though more in perspective than in tactics. For the purpose of clarity, it will be well to keep this distinction in mind. The verbal tactics the prince uses to express his antic disposition are the same as those that Shakespeare's three most famous fools employ to point up folly and vice. Like Touchstone, Feste, and Lear's boy, Hamlet, under the cover of his melancholy madness, puns, manipulates syllogisms, asserts paradoxes, and asks riddling questions to conduct his disguised dialectic with the king and the court.

Like the motley costume of his counterparts, Hamlet's antic disguise provides freedom to discharge barbs and honest wisdom. Indeed, Hamlet's antic disposition is his cap and bells. Wearing it, like Touchstone, "He uses his folly like a stalking horse, and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit" (*AYLI*. 5.4.106-07). His pretended madness also enables him to use a technique of Feste's. Like Feste, Hamlet knows "A sentence is but a chev'ril glove to a good wit" (*TN*. 3.2. 11-12). Utilizing word plays that Feste shares with Touchstone and Lear's boy, the prince utters many antic remarks whose oxymoronic doubleness, like the pliable kidskin gloves Feste refers to, turn inside out the folly and hypocrisy of the other characters. In this respect, as we shall see, Hamlet's resemblance to Lear's boy becomes most apparent in the graveyard scene. In tone and syntax, the quizzical rhetorical questions he poses to Horatio bear a striking similarity to the riddles Lear's fool puts to Lear.⁷ Shakespeare

⁶Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*, (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1935), contains a stimulating discussion of Erasmian and Shakespearean fools but nothing on Hamlet.

⁷Robert Hillis Goldsmith, *Wise Fools In Shakespeare*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1958), has a useful discussion of Lear's fool, but nothing on Hamlet.

most intensely patterns Hamlet's use of the wise fool's tactics and his articulation of the Erasmian Christian fool's perspectives in the graveyard scene. While doing so, the prince resembles a third type of fool, Death 'the antic,' the stylized, joking skeleton who leads Hans Holbein the Younger's *Dance of Death*.⁸ Any division of Hamlet's rhetoric must, of course, be somewhat artificial. Sometimes his puns are part of his paradoxes and syllogisms. Sometimes his syllogisms solve his paradoxical-riddling questions. Hamlet employs these rhetorical devices whether his perspective parallels that of the Shakespearean wise fools, the Erasmian Christian fool, or Holbein's mocking Death. Just as any division of Hamlet's rhetoric must be somewhat artificial, so must any attempt to analyze the roles he plays throughout the drama. Like all the fools he resembles, he satirizes wordly wisdom, but his perspective, unlike theirs, is not ultimately Christian. This will be clearest in the discussion of 5.1 and 5.2.

Puns are an excellent tactic for guardedly pointing up hypocrisy because they can express two meanings simultaneously. Even before he feigns madness, Hamlet utilizes puns to express his conflicts with Claudius and the court. His first reply to Claudius, "A little more than kin, and less than kind" (1.2. 64-65), is paradoxical, but it is made in an aside. His first open reply to Claudius shows him quickly masking his hostility in paronomasia. His response to Claudius's question about his gloomy countenance is a quibble, "Not so, my lord, I am too much in the sun" (1.2. 67). The frequently noticed play on "sun," commenting on Claudius's "son," simultaneously denies Claudius's imputation that his face is less than cheerful and expresses his hidden hostility to his incestuous uncle's hypocritical attempt to assume the role of loving father. Hamlet conceals his contradiction of his mother's criticism of his grief as too excessive by his quibble on "common" (1.2.73) which also means "vulgar." Even in the veiled conflicts of the council chamber scene, Hamlet's wordplays indicate his disillusioned resentments.

As the play progresses and Hamlet's knowledge and rage increase, he dons his antic disposition, that is, he cloaks his angry utterances with an extreme doubleness that makes them seem insane. To Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he discloses, "I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a hand-saw" (2.2.378-79). On the

⁸Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Dance of Death*, ed. Werner, L. Gundersheimer (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1971), p. xii, typed in text as G. Levin notes: "Hamlet's meditation thus develops the metaphor that Richard II adumbrates when he personifies Death as 'the antic' who scoffs and grins at the pomp of kings (iii. ii. 162)," p. 123.

surface he seems to mean that in his madness he cannot distinguish between a predatory bird and a hand tool. But "hand-saw" is also a quibble on "heirshaw," a heron. The antanacrisis hides from them his ability to see his old friends as the predatory birds of Claudius that they are, while it expresses their hypocrisy to the audience. Hamlet's puns also express the hostility he feels towards Claudius, the agent behind his old friends, his father's murderer, his mother's seducer, and usurper of the crown. When Claudius enters to see the Mousetrap and asks how Hamlet "fares" (3.2.92), the prince fastens on the verb and interprets it as "eats" instead of "does." His answer—"Excellent, i' faith, of the chameleon's dish: I eat the air promise cramm'd"—exposes the doubleness of the king's pretended concern for him, especially in naming Hamlet heir to the throne. His reply turns the king's hypocrisy inside out as if it were one of the "chev'ril gloves" of Feste. Hamlet's answer, seeming the remark of a madman, indicates his angry hunger for what is rightfully his own. Similarly, just before the play-within-the play begins, Hamlet explains his personal title for *The Murder of Gonzago*, the Mouse-trap, to Claudius "tropically" (3.2.37-38), which puns on "trapically." His polite explanation conceals in the pun his contempt for the ratlike Claudius; in Elizabethan times, the king was usually compared to the king of beasts, the lion.

About the corpse of Polonius, he observes to Gertrude,

This counsellor
Is now most still, most secret, and most grave,
Who was in life a foolish prating knave.
Come, sir, to draw toward an end with you.

(3.4. 213-16)

"Grave" is a grim joke. In one aspect of it, Polonius is wiser now that he is dead. In answer to Claudius's inquiry for Polonius, Hamlet says "A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him" (4.3. 19-20). The doubleness of Hamlet's pun on "politic" refers to Polonius's vain pride in his political abilities and Claudius's machiavellian use of him. Hamlet reveals where he has hidden Polonius's corpse with a brutally comprehensible pun upon nose/know: "You shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby" (4.3. 36). Quibbling and punning on words like a wise fool, Hamlet vents his wrath and exposes folly.

Hamlet also manipulates logic to contradict the king and the court. His syllogisms point up the seeming and actual doubleness he encounters at Elsinore. Like Feste, Hamlet knows, "*Cucullus non facit monachum*" (TN. 1.5. 55), that appearance is often the reverse of reality. Although Ophelia seems chaste and beautiful, Hamlet transforms what was "sometime a

paradox" (3.1. 113) into a syllogistic proof which accuses her of dishonesty. If she is honest and fair, her honesty "should admit no discourse to her beauty," "for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness." This denies Ophelia's innocent expectation that beauty should "have commerce" (108-9) with honesty, and translates the paradox into a syllogism which, except for its bitterness, is similar to Feste's response to Olivia:

Anything that's mended is but patched; virtue that transgresses is but patched with sin, and sin that amends is but patched with virtue. If that this simple syllogism will serve . . .

(1.5. 47-50)

which points up the motley appearance and the paradoxical doubleness of human morality in the eyes of a wise fool.

Syllogisms allow their users to substitute terms. Since they seek only to prove validity and not truth, they are especially well suited for manipulation. One of Hamlet's barbs, discharged in his parting from Claudius, illustrates the possibilities of the method excellently. Hamlet insists on addressing the king as "dear mother" (4.3. 49) and expounds a syllogism: "My mother: father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh, so my mother." The syllogism plays on the biblical definition of marriage, and, referring to Claudius's seduction of Gertrude, its substituted term, "mother," taunts Claudius with his hypocrisy. Like Touchstone's syllogisms, Hamlet's hit their targets "According to the fool's bolt, sir, and such dulcet diseases" (*AYLI*. 5.4. 64-65).

In addition to punning and manipulating logic, a wise fool can, and often does, handle any situation or utterance paradoxically. In Hamlet's eyes, the moral life of Elsinore is sophomoric, tragically so. The court's hypocritical wordly wisdom is seriously foolish. Hamlet's antic remarks, in their pointed foolishness, that is, in their oxymoronic wisdom, point up this reality to the audience. His ironic witticisms mirror the paradoxical reality he confronts. In his encounter with Polonius, as he paraphrases the satire of old men that he reads, Hamlet takes the paradoxical position that speech is honesty, while writing is slander:

Slanders, sir; for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards that their faces are wrinkled. . . .

(2.2. 196-204)

Hamlet's oxymoronic explanation of his assertion that he reads slanders is that if the impossible were possible, the truth would be falsehood. Hamlet knows that because the truth is evaded in Elsinore, honesty is slander

there. In a similar mode, shortly after his encounter with Polonius, Hamlet describes Claudius and Gertrude oxymoronically to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as "my uncle-father and aunt-mother" (2. 2. 376). His remark points up the incestuous roles his father's brother and his mother have undertaken. It also harps again on Claudius's earlier hypocritical assertion that he is Hamlet's loving father, turns the king's duplicity inside out, and once more exemplifies Feste's observation that a sentence is nothing but a reversible kidskin glove to a witty man because he can quickly turn the wrong side of it outward. While uttering his paradox, which is, ironically, pointedly foolish, Hamlet may seem to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern a melancholy madman who cannot understand the rightness of the king and queen's relation to himself and to each other; however, his hidden point is that he resents the wrongness of their relationship to each other and to himself. At this point, Hamlet, may, perhaps, like Feste, be considered a "corrupter of words" (*TN*. 3.1. 36) because, like Feste, he corrupts words by fooling with them. Hamlet propounds another paradox, when, having been arrested by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he asserts that "the king is a thing of nothing" (4.2. 28). Hamlet's remark is puzzling because a person cannot be nothing, no thing. But the paradox resembles the riddle Lear's fool offers Lear: "Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?" (1.4. 130-31) That is, Lear's fool asks the old king if he cannot make something out of nothing. Hamlet's remark is also pointedly foolish. As John Dover Wilson has observed, Hamlet considers Claudius, in the light of a biblical perspective, a thing of no account.⁹ "Man is like a thing of nought, his time passeth away like a shadow" (Ps. 144 : 4), and yet important enough to kill, as his hidden threat indicates. If "nothing" is read as a pun, the corrupt king, infecting all of Denmark, is certainly a thing worth noting.

Hamlet's perception of the paradoxical doubleness of life at court is a tragic parallel to Touchstone's comic insights into the contrasting aspects of Corin's life in the country as a shepherd :

Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is nought. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vild life. Now in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare life (look you) it fits my humor well; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against my stomach.

(*AYLI*. 3.2. 13-21).

⁹John Dover Wilson, ed. *Hamlet* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1967), note to 4.3. 27-29.

Touchstone's evaluation reminds us of a famous passage in Erasmus's *Moriae Encomium*, in which another fool, The Goddess Folly, evaluates all human affairs in terms of their contrasting aspects or paradoxical doubleness :

First, all human affairs, like the Sileni of Alcibiades have two opposite aspects; so that what at first glance (as they say) seems to be death, on closer inspection is seen to be life. . . . The same is true of what is apparently beautiful and ugly, rich and poor, shameful and glorious, learned and ignorant, strong and weak, noble and base, joyous and sad, fortunate and adverse, friendly and inimical, healthful and harmful. In short, you will find all things suddenly reversed if you open the Silenus.

(*Mor.* p. 65)

Touchstone employs this perspective when he considers the features of country life. Hamlet's pointedly foolish antic utterances repeatedly evoke a similar doubleness of vision.

Hamlet's questions and remarks continue to parallel the tactics and traditional function of the wise fool even after he doffs his no longer needed antic disposition in the graveyard scene.¹⁰ When with Horatio, who, unlike the hypocritical members of Claudius's court, is truly wise, Hamlet continues to point up the folly of the worldly wise who lead lives for the sole purpose of worldly comfort or success. As Levin has pointed out, the principal device that Hamlet employs is *interrogatio* (p. 19). He asks seventy questions in the course of the scene. His questions to Horatio, like Feste's to Olivia, "catechize" (*TN.* 1.5. 62) the listener. Touchstone also employs questions, but the fool whom Hamlet resembles most closely in the use of this trope is Lear's. During the course of the scene, his dialectic with Horatio enacts the traditional dialectic of the wise fool and foolish wiseman. Because he expects Horatio's agreement, many of Hamlet's lines seem more like assertions than questions. His questions, implying their answers, are rhetorical. Two of them begin as declarative sentences: "This might be the pate of a politician. . . . This might be my Lord Such-a-one. . ." (78-84). These speculations are questions only because Hamlet tags a "might it not?" on to the end of them. The great buyer of land is described in a declarative sentence: "This fellow might be in's time a great buyer of land" (102-103). Other of his questions resemble easily answered riddles: "Did these bones cost no more the breeding, but to play at loggats with them?" (91-2). "Where be his quiddities now, his

¹⁰M.C. Bradbrook, *Shakespeare: The Poet and His World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 191, notes "Hamlet is his own fool, for Yorick is dead."

quillities, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks?" (99-100). "Why does he suffer this mad knave . . .?" (101). One might as well ask where last year's snow can be found. The questions point up the transitoriness of human life and the folly of relying on worldly wisdom.

Like Hamlet in his dialectic with Horatio, Lear's fool, during his dialectic with his master, asks many questions that are little more than assertions. As Hamlet expects many assents from Horatio, so does the half-wit fool from Lear: "May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse?" (1.4. 223-24). "If a man's brains were in his heels, were't not in danger of kibes?" (2.1. 8-9). To be sure, unlike the questions of Hamlet, which satirize excessive reliance on worldly wisdom, those of Lear's boy harp on the folly of the old king who had too little thought for the morrow.

Like those of Shakespeare's other fools, many of Hamlet's observations and questions are also comic. His question about the lawyer's lost tools and techniques extends into a comic list that ends with a deflating Anglo-Saxon monosyllable: "Where be his quiddities now, his quillities, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks?" (99-100). His queries on the fate of the landowner are full of puns that are only partially sympathetic. "Is this the fine of his fines and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? Will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures?" (106-110). Though the sight of Yorick's skull sickens him, Hamlet, paralleling Lear's fool, labors to outjest his own abhorrence: "Not one now to mock your own grinning—quite chop-fall'n? (191-92). And, finally, his lament for Caesar is serio-comic:

O that that earth which kept the world in awe
Should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw!
(215-16)

Perhaps the final point of comparison between Hamlet and Lear's boy here is their explicit use of the *tu quoque*, the essence of the fool's role. When Lear correctly answers his fool's riddle about the Pleiades, his fool replies "Yes, indeed, thou wouldst make a good fool" (2. 1. 38). Hamlet calls the skulls he meditates on fools also, although they are not alive to hear his *tu quoque*. When Horatio agrees that parchment is made from sheep and calves' skins, Hamlet concludes "They are sheep and calves which seek out assurance in that" (116-17). Parchment was used for legal documents. If legal documents can be considered a synecdoche for reliance on earthly wisdom and protection, Hamlet posits that all men are fools, perforce, but, especially, men who seek only their own comfort and advancement while alive.

Employing the tactics of the Shakespearean fool, Hamlet here ques-

tions the values of all the types he imagines. He examines the paradoxical features of their lives: the power and policy of the politician; the breeding and begging of the courtier, his pride and sycophancy; the special knowledge and dishonesty of the lawyer; the debt provoking documents which symbolize the material ambitions of the great buyer of land; the mocking of others and ultimately of self by Yorick; and the ostensible beauty and painting of the lady. In Hamlet's meditation, these lives, even Yorick's, are trivial and transitory. Viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*, their lives, which seemed so wise on the surface but are foolish, recall the Sileni of Alcibiades in which values are reversed on closer inspection. In the graveyard, Hamlet sees how the appearances of worldly wisdom are suddenly reversed by death and revealed as folly. When alive, these types held power and respect. Now dead, they are handled and shovelled roughly by the sexton. As Hamlet says. "Here's fine revolution, an we had the trick to see't" (90-91). In the graveyard, Hamlet contemplates the final turn that all human affairs take. And, again, like a wise fool, he satirizes the ironic reversals suffered by the lives that death turns inside out.

After he encounters Yorick's skull, which provokes recognition of his own mortality, Hamlet evaluates Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. These two rulers were types of his ideal, like his father, the dead king. With the absoluteness of the sexton, whose language he criticized earlier, Hamlet expounds a sorites that demonstrates why it is logical that the two world conquerors, and, by implication, all men, may return to "base uses" (202):

Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust;
the dust is earth; of earth we make loam; and why of that loam
whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer barrel?

(208-12)

His quatrain on Caesar, as we have seen, dismisses his death with an irreverent joke. Hamlet accepts with wry mockery the inevitable loss of every life, even the most significant, in the ultimate finality and universality of death.

Although Hamlet's riddling wit causes many laughs, the emotional effects of the graveyard scene are mixed, as they so often are in Shakespeare. The scene is clearly somber. Indeed, the scene as a whole evokes the dance of death. The sexton leads the dance, although unwittingly. When the moment for Hamlet to confront his mortality comes, the sexton presents Yorick's skull to him, and Hamlet takes up the role of leader of the dance, the grinning skeleton, Death 'the antic.' Hans Holbein's depictions of dances of death in particular may well have stimulated Hamlet's jesting queries. The grinning skeleton, a ghastly variation of the wise

Christian fool, appears in each of Holbein's woodcuts and interrupts the activity of a variety of characters. Quatrains resembling Hamlet's questions appear below each illustration; passages from both testaments of the Bible appear above. Holbein's work varies from the original motif which

originated no later than the early fifteenth century, . . . in France, . . . it was an elongated mural painting, either in a church or on the walls of a churchyard or burial ground. It depicted a series of figures, . . . in procession. The living figures are generally presented in the order of their social precedence on earth, and there is usually an alternating series of living forms and cadavers or skeletons . . . Holbein's woodcuts, though heavily indebted to this pictorial tradition . . . also draw on another mode of depicting scenes of human mortality, known as *Memento mori*. In such works, a single individual appears in the company of a skeleton or some other symbol of mortality. . . . Holbein's work places the familiar social types of the Dance of the Dead into individual vignettes of the 'Memento mori' type."

(G. p. x)

Two aspects of the dance are relevant to this study:

First, there is the overriding idea of the omnipresence and universality of death. All men regardless of their earthly status are equal before it. It strikes capriciously and unexpectedly, seizing the king at his table, the merchant at his warehouse, the baby at his mother's breast . . . Nobody is immune, and no protest can affect its final ghastly leer. . . . Each of the woodcuts . . . uses the same symbolic device. A stylized skeleton interrupts the activity of the person marked for death, and tugs him away.

(G. pp. xi-xii)

The second aspect of the dance is its mockery. "In almost all of these scenes, the skeleton mocks the living person, while summoning him to die" (G. p. xii). Each woodcut is accompanied with a quatrain expressing its theme. These quatrains express a feeling remarkably like that evoked by Hamlet's commentary as he handles the skulls and bones.

Although there is not a one to one correspondence between the members Holbein depicts and Hamlet's metaphoric dance, the attitude of Death 'the antic' is very similar to Hamlet's. However, Hamlet, until his replacement by the sexton, is both summoner and summoned. Both 'antics' satirize the vanities of their respective groups. Both expose the ultimate smallness of wasted lives which on the surface seem so wise, dignified, successful or comfortable. Death 'the antic' not only interrupts his victims, but, like Hamlet, mocks them from the perspective of the wise, if not always gentle, Christian fool.

In 5.1 Hamlet asks questions which are paralleled by Holbein's Dance of Death. Needless to say, he knows the tragic answers.

Holbein's Death, in defiance of the prosperous nobleman's drawn sword, drags him away (Fig. 1). Holbein's Duke is another whom Death singles out (Fig. 2). Holbein's King is admonished (Fig. 3). Holbein's ladies are treated just as roughly (Fig. 4). He issues the same admonition to the Queen (Fig. 5).

Holbein's advocate and miser, like Hamlet's lawyer and great buyer of land, are subject to death. The miser, who strongly resembles Hamlet's possessor of land, is explicitly called a fool. He is representative of all Hamlet's and Holbein's types, that is, of fools who are seeking earthly ends, which are transient and futile. Above the woodcut, Holbein cites Luke 12:20, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" Ultimately, it is not surprising that, when Hamlet faces Yorick's skull, he even includes himself as a member of the dance of death: "To what base uses we may return, Horatio!" (5.1. 202).

During the graveyard scene, Hamlet's perspective parallels that of the Erasmian Christian fool, whose chief characteristic is his reliance on the Providence of Christ. Like the Erasmian fool, Hamlet rejects the wisdom of worldly acquisition. While doing so, he evokes several New Testament passages. During Hamlet's satire of the politician and landowner, Shakespeare's audience might easily have recalled verses such as: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mk. 8 : 36-7) or "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal" (Mt. 6 : 19). However, he does not as yet advocate the Erasmian wise fool's chief characteristic, the abandonment of reason for reliance on the Providence of Christ.

In 5.1 while wielding his wit like a wise fool, Hamlet recognizes and accepts his own and his father's mortality. This, it would seem, provides him with a strong motivation to act as if he believes in Providence in 5.2. His reason has failed. Acting on the evidence of his senses, his earthly reason, he has mistakenly slain Polonius. He is about to witness Ophelia's interment, for which he is indirectly responsible. Most importantly, his revenge is still unaccomplished. Since reliance on reason, that is, worldly wisdom, which in Erasmian terms is ultimately folly, has failed, it is, paradoxically, logical that in his extremity he might turn his life and will over to the care of the mystery he chooses to call Providence.¹¹

¹¹See Maynard Mack, "The World of *Hamlet*," in *Shakespeare, The Tragedies*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1964), pp. 58-59.

Hamlet As Fool

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That is, Hamlet is ready to act accepting a Providential order. In Erasmian terms, he has seen himself as wise fool and foolish wise man; it is clear to him that a perspective similar to that of the wise Christian fool is better than that of a foolish wise man. In response to Horatio's offer to delay the duel with Laertes, he declares:

Not a whit. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come, if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come.

(5.2. 219-22)

His words refer to Matthew 10:29 and Luke 22:24. This reliance on Providence exposes the Christian fool to the vicissitudes of life. Another possible earlier indication that Hamlet is moving towards or has accepted a vulnerability like that of the Erasmian Christian fool occurs in his letter to Claudius after the pirates have released him in which he asserts, "High and mighty, you shall know I am set naked on your kingdom" (4.7. 43-4). His encounter with death has stripped him of all earthly trappings. Like Lear, he has been reduced. Hamlet, of course, is willing to duel with Laertes. It is indeed possible, that at this point in the play, Hamlet is willing to abandon his plans for revenge, and accept even failure and death:

"The readiness is all. Since no man, of aught he leaves, knows aught, what is't to leave betimes? Let be."

(5.2. 222-24)

Though Hamlet's character is not reducible to a type of Christ, the resemblances to Christ, the Erasmian fool par excellence, grow more noticeable as the play nears its end. As Erasmus writes, "Christ himself . . . became something like a fool in order to cure the folly of mankind. . . . He did not wish to redeem them by any way except by the foolishness of the cross" (p. 125). The reference here is to I Corinthians 1:18.

Hamlet played the fool under the guise of his antic disposition to begin his task of revenging his father and purging Elsinore of the folly and vice that infected it. Throughout the play, he, like Christ, has been about his father's business, the curing of the sick and morally rotting state of Denmark. He acts like a Christian fool when he accepts the duel with Laertes, for this exposes him to Laertes and Claudius's treachery. Finally, like Christ, he sacrifices his life to accomplish his task.

THE NOBLEMAN

What man is it that liveth, and shall not see
Death? Shall he deliver his soul from the
hand of the grave? *Psalm lxxxix, 48.*



Who is the man, however strong or great,
Who can escape the final destiny?—
Who can avoid the dark and awful gate,
Or cheat grim Death of certain victory?

Figure 1

THE DUKE

The prince shall be clothed with desolation. . .
 I will also make the pomp of the strong to
 cease. *Ezekiel vii, 27 and 24.*



Come, potent prince, with me alone—
 Leave transient poms of worldly state;
 I am the one who can fling down
 The pride and honours of the great.

Figure 2

THE KING

And he that is to-day a king, to-morrow shall
die. *Ecclesiasticus* x, 10.



He who to-day is yet a king,
To-morrow shall entombéd be,
Nor carry with him anything
Of all his transient royalty.

Figure 3

THE EMPRESS

And those that walk in pride he is able to
abase. *Daniel iv, 37.*



Ye who walk forth in pomp superb,
Within brief space to Death must bow;
As bends beneath the tread the herb,
Ye also must be trodden low.

Figure 4

THE QUEEN

Rise up, ye women that are at ease; hear my voice, ye careless daughters; give ear unto my speech. Many days and years shall ye be troubled. *Isaiah xxxii, 9, 10.*



Daughters of rank and wealth, arise !
List to a warning from the dead;
After vain days and years mis-spent,
Come pangs that ye shall learn to dread.

Figure 5

NOTES

Foxe, Shakespeare, and Hamlet's "Country Matters"

WARREN W. WOODEN

Prior to the Mousetrap play at the center of *Hamlet* occurs a "greasy" exchange between Hamlet and Ophelia at Act III, ii, 101-123. known as the "country matters" passage, which begins as follows:

Ham. Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

Oph. No, my lord.

Ham. I mean, my head upon your lap?

Oph. Ay, my lord.

Ham. Do you think I meant country matters?

Oph. I think nothing, my lord.

Ham. That's a fair thought to lie between maid's legs.

The passage has been much studied and the complicated sexual paronomasia explicated by Eric Partridge in *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, Hilda Hulme in *Explorations in Shakespeare's Language*, and Thomas Pyles in "Ophelia's 'Nothing'," (*MLN*, LXIV [1949], 322-323). While the recovery of the multiple meanings of Hamlet's punning play on "the venereal vernacular," in Pyles's fine phrase, of Shakespeare's day is welcome, it does little to illuminate the context of Hamlet's remarks or to resolve his attitude toward Ophelia, described by John Dover Wilson as "without doubt the greatest of all the puzzles in the play, greater even than that of the delay itself."¹ For Hamlet, the key to his relationship with Ophelia seems to hinge largely on the extent of her complicity in the plan of Polonius and Claudius to "loose" her on him as a means of determining the depth of his suspicion and inclination for active vengeance. Or, as Hamlet bluntly asks her, "Ha, ha! are you honest?" (III, i, 103) I suggest that Hamlet is still pursuing this question of Ophelia's honesty, both sexual and personal, through a specific allusion pertinent to the matter that many members of Shakespeare's contemporary audience might find recognizable and relevant. Here Shakespeare echoes a key phrase from one of the most vivid and shocking episodes of the second edition of John Foxe's great *Acts and Monuments* (1570), an episode which commingles the erotic and the horrible. In describing the persecutions of the early Christians, Foxe recalls the unexampled barbarity of the Arethusians:

¹What Happens in *Hamlet*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1962), p. 101.

But especially the crueltie of the Arethusians, a people of Syria, exceeded agagnt those Christian virgines, whom they set out naked before the multitude to be scorned, after that beyng shaven, they couered them with swill and draffe, wont to be geuen to their hogs, and so caused their bowels and flesh to be deuoured of the hungry swyne. This rage+fury of the wicked Arethusians, Sozomenus supposeth to come of this, because that Constantinus before had broken them from their countrey maner, of setting forth and exposing their virgins, filthely to whomsoeuer lusted, and destroyed the Temple of Venus in Heliopolis: restraining the people there from their filthynesse and vile whoredome.²

Foxe's indelible account of the Arethusians' practice, outstanding even in a compilation of horrors, appears in the second and all subsequent editions of *The Acts and Monuments*, including those set up by official order in every cathedral, church, and canon's dwelling during Elizabeth's reign. By the time *Hamlet* was first performed, Foxe's book had gone through five editions and was more widely read in England than any book save for the Bible itself and perhaps The Book of Common Prayer. Although the phrase "countrey maner" is Foxe's own, his knowledge of the Arethusians derives as he indicates from Sozomenus who clarifies that the period of shameful service was temporary: "the citizens of Heliopolis perpetrated this barbarity against the holy virgins on account of the prohibition of the ancient custom of yielding up virgins to prostitution with any chance comer before being united in marriage to their betrothed."³

I do not wish to belabor a correspondence impossible of absolute proof. Still, the case for an allusion to Foxe in Hamlet's phrase is attractive and can enrich our appreciation of a difficult passage in the play. There is no question that Shakespeare, like most of his audience, knew *The Acts and Monuments* well, and the key phrase, Foxe's "countrey maner" and Shakespeare's "country matters," is not a common one prior to Shakespeare's play. The *OED* lists no usage of either variant prior to *Hamlet* and the two phrases are sufficiently close that without reference to Foxe some editors, like Dr. Johnson in his 1765 edition, propose the emendation of Shakespeare's "country matters" to "country

²*Acts and Monuments of These Latter and Perilous Dayes, Touching Matters of the Church* . . . (London: John Day, 1570), p. 100.

³*The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen, Comprising a History of the Church, From A.D. 323 to A.D. 425*. Translated from the Greek. Vol. II of *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Second Series. Edited by Henry Wace and Philip Schaff (Oxford: Parker and Co., 1891), p. 333.

manners."⁴ But it is in the contextual reference of the phrase in *Hamlet* that an allusion to Foxe is most compelling. Foxe's "countrey maner" alludes to a sensational incident which conjoins physical sex with loathing and revulsion, a fit rubric for Hamlet's emotional turmoil engendered by Gertrude's activities and Ophelia's part as pawn of Claudius and Polonius. Finally, the Foxe allusion is another sharp reminder to the audience of the grave risk Ophelia, however innocent in herself, runs by being a party to the crude scheme, the "country maner," of her father and the king.

⁴*Johnson on Shakespeare*. Edited by Arthur Sherbo. Vol. VIII of the Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), II, 985.

“Sullied” Or “Solid”: Hamlet’s Flesh Once More

ROBERT F. WILLSON, JR.

Robert F. Fleissner’s note on the “solid” vs. “sullied” crux in *Hamlet* (*ES*, 59 [December 1978], 508-509) pretends to solve the textual dilemma by embracing “sullied” on the grounds that it fits better with the alchemical metaphor adopted by Hamlet for the passage (1.2.129-30). The argument adduced by Professor Fleissner is a model of scholarly case-building, citing first the adherents of each school of interpretation; moving then to a discussion of alchemical terminology and its appropriateness for Hamlet’s conceit; introducing evidence of alchemical imagery employed by fellow Renaissance writers, “notably Donne and Vaughan”; noting other words from the context, especially “resolue” and “Dew,” that were current in the lexicon of alchemy; and concluding with an observation that implicit punning may be found in lines preceding and following those in question. Except for one lapse in organization (the section on other alchemical terms in Hamlet’s speech belongs with the main argument in the second paragraph), Professor Fleissner adopts a methodology typical of scholarly notes dealing with textual problems in Shakespeare’s plays.

The trouble is that this note is no more likely than others of its kind to “solve” the dilemma. If a future editor of the play decides that this assertion has merit, he may use it to help defend his choice of “sullied” over “solid.” The greater likelihood, however, is that the editor will make his decision not on poetic or metaphoric evidence but on the basis of which text—Quarto or Folio—he happens to be using. He will probably not feel compelled to underscore an alchemical metaphor that may or may not have been in Hamlet’s (Shakespeare’s ?) brain.

More important, especially for teachers or critics who might be inclined to consider such information, the case for “sullied” over “solid” on the basis of its relation to alchemy is not persuasive. Why could not “solid” prove the better choice, since the alchemist was in the business of melting down something base? “Solid” deserves just as much consideration because it clearly implied “hard” or “compact” in Elizabethan usage (*OED*). Professor Fleissner’s claim rests on the assumption that the process of melting down creates a dew or “purified water,” a substance we are urged to associate with Hamlet’s “golden ideals.” (These ideals are nowhere identified or discussed). The logic breaks down here: is not gold, the end product of transmutation, ultimately a solid material? That which is burned away is the imperfect, not the perfect, matter of the process. Surely it makes better sense to read Hamlet’s remark as referring to a hardened substance (his flesh) that he wishes not to purify but to extirpate. Dew may be distilled

water in Professor Fleissner's mind but in Hamlet's at this moment, fixed as it is on self-destruction (see lines 131 ff.), the word means the elimination of substantial life—an escape into nothingness. Had he looked Professor Fleissner would have found this idea of obliteration expressed in similar terms in Henry IV's weary comment on "the revolution of the times": "... the continent, / Weary of solid firmness, melt[s] / Itself into the sea. . ." (2H4, 3.1. 47-49). Given this parallel, it would seem to make better sense to invoke the microcosmic metaphor: Hamlet longs for the dissolution of his "little world" of man.

Nowhere in his argument, moreover, does Professor Fleissner explicate the word "Thaw," which must be deemed as critical a term as "resolute" and "Dew." In Shakespeare's day, as in ours, "Thaw" meant melt in the sense of ice turning into water; no other meaning could reasonably be adduced. In order to substantiate the case, does not "Thaw" have to be accounted for in the alchemical scheme?

That there is wordplay in Hamlet's "the Euerlasting had not fixt/His Cannon 'gainst Selfe-slaughter" cannot be denied; but should this be offered as a legitimate argument for Shakespeare's employment of alchemical punning? The abundant puns uttered by Hamlet throughout the play obviate any claim that a special instance signifies anything beyond itself. "A little more than kin and less than kind" cannot be cited as evidence that Shakespeare intends to prepare us for an alchemical pun in a subsequent passage. Here again, logic breaks down.

Claims of resolution like Professor Fleissner's are bound to fail. Who will, after all, decide the issue? We have no recognized Shakespearean authority nor authorized manuscripts, and we are not likely to have them. We do, however, have many editors whose tastes, biases, poetic and dramatic senses vary. Thus we are assured a continuing debate over the "sullied/solid" question. It may prove more fruitful for ingenious puzzle-solvers to send their ideas directly to editors rather than to professional journals. Their impact in these forums is likely to be minor indeed.

“Bawds” Not “Bonds”

J.J.M. TOBIN

Editors still differ over the “pious *bonds*” or “pious *bawds*” cited by Polonius to characterize the vows given by Hamlet to Ophelia (1.3.130).¹ Theobald’s inspired emendation, ‘bawds’, seems still more justified when one adds a consideration of Shakespeare’s source for this scene to the usual textual argument that the ‘u’ in ‘bauds’ (an Elizabethan variant of ‘bawds’) was turned or mistaken for an ‘n’.

Shakespeare made considerable use of Apuleius’s *The Golden Asse* (Adlington translation) throughout his career, sometimes drawing upon the English version and sometimes that version and the Latin original. *Hamlet* is no exception to that practice. Arguments have been made that not only are there Apuleian elements behind the ‘fishmonger’, ‘fardels’, and ‘baker’s daughter’ references in the tragedy,² but that the relationship of Polonius, Ophelia, and Hamlet, that is, of anxious father, vulnerable daughter, and young lover of a socially superior class, is based upon the anxious Venus, the moral and vulnerable Psyche, and the young immortal Cupid.

Indeed, the Shakespearean text is marked by a number of Apuleian words and phrases, with the perhaps most interesting diction given to Ophelia in her discussion with Laertes³ and to Polonius in his coarsely paternal advice to his daughter. The chief value of knowing this Apuleian material is that one perceives the parallel between the generally passive, socially unequal, temporarily deserted, almost drowned Psyche who has been made pregnant by Cupid, and the generally passive, socially unequal, and eventually quite drowned Ophelia who is given her St. Valentine’s Day song in which sexual intercourse and consequent desertion are at the center. Just such events as the song describes are those which Polonius warns Ophelia against, as had Laertes before him. His warning with its crude play on ‘tender’ is prompted less by his concern for Ophelia than his embarrassment over the prospect of becoming the grandfather of an illegitimate child. Polonius’s behaviour is modelled upon that of the socially conscious Venus who is anxious lest she become the grandmother of an illegitimate child: “For beeing of *tender* and unripe yeares, thou hast with too licentious appetite embraced my most mortall Foe, to whome I shall bee

¹All quotations and line references are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston, 1974).

²See Tobin, “Apuleius and the Bradleian Tragedies,” *Shakespeare Survey*, 31 (1978), esp. 34-6.

³See Tobin, “Apuleius and Ophelia,” *The Classical Bulletin*, 56, Number 5 (1980), 69-71.

made a mother, and shee a Daughter" (p. 117) and "Behold she thinketh (that by reason of her great belly, which she hath gotten by playing the whore) to move me to pitty, and to make me a grandmother to her childe" (p. 122).⁴

Venus addresses Cupid as a 'trifling boy' (p. 117), stresses his youth, and hears her sister goddesses call him 'young' (p. 118). One recalls that Laertes cites the 'trifling' of Hamlet's favor (1.3.5) and Polonius urges Ophelia to believe of Hamlet "that he is *young*" (124). In the paragraph before that in which she cites his 'tender' years Venus asks the rhetorical question, "Is this an honest thing, is this *honourable* to thy parents?" Ophelia attempts to resist the implication of the scenario painted by her father with her poignant "My lord, he hath importun'd me with love/In *honorable* fashion" (1.3.110-111).

In the immediately preceding paragraph in which Venus first learns that Psyche is Cupid's love, the very girl to whom the goddess had sent her son as an agent of retribution, the irate deity's last words before "Is this an honest thing, is this *honourable* to thy parents" are "What did he think that I was a *bawd*, by whose shew he fell acquainted with the maid" (p. 116). It may be that Polonius uses the word 'bawds' so easily because he is projecting onto Hamlet his own amorous history ("I do know,/When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul/Lends the tongue vows"—1.3.115-17) or that he expresses himself this way because his own subsequent loosing of Ophelia to Hamlet has more than a touch of the pander about it, but the probability is that Polonius's creator who thought in terms of the Venus-Cupid-Psyche tensions when he wrote of Polonius-Hamlet-Ophelia and gave so many terms from Apuleius/Adlington to the old counsellor, his son Laertes, and his daughter when they discussed the Prince, including 'honourable', 'trifling', 'tender', 'young', 'dalliance',⁵ etc., introduced also the idea of a sexual go-between in the word 'bawd', a term made plural by Polonius.⁶

Indeed, although Pope tried to make an ass out of Theobald in *The Dunciad*, we may note that Theobald deserves the last, perhaps braying, laugh as *The Golden Asse* lends further probability to his celebrated emendation of 'bawds' for 'bonds'.⁷

⁴Throughout I have used Adlington's translation as it appears in the Tudor Translations edited by W.E. Henley, Vol. IV.

⁵See "Apuleius and Ophelia," p. 70.

⁶For the ease with which Shakespeare alters number as well as gender in his use of source material see Tobin, "Apuleius and Othello" and "Apuleius and Shakespeare," *Notes and Queries*, April 1977 and April 1978.

⁷See especially the link between Theobald and asininity on the title page of the first edition of *The Dunciad Variorum* of 1729.

PRODUCTIONS

Teatar ITD's *Hamlet*

Teatar ITD from Zagreb marked its fifteenth anniversary with a production of *Hamlet* which was remarkable for two reasons: the use of puppets designed for the occasion, and the relation it established between the Shakespeare play and the short version by Tom Stoppard. The text was an adaptation which brought the standard Croatian translation of *Hamlet* face to face with *The Dogg's troupe 15-Minute Hamlet*, rendered in a rough colloquial idiom of the spoken Croatian. The result was similar to Stoppard's use of Dogg's language in *The Dogg's Hamlet*: questioning of the meaning of both Shakespearean and modern expression. As in Stoppard, the juxtaposition of the contemporary dialogue with the lines from the translation of Shakespeare, had a comic effect. Lines such as 'to be or not to be' which are well known to enjoy a proverbial status, mingled with a nonsensical sentence or a line in Italian and German. Rather like the two builders from *The Dogg's Hamlet*, who communicate by referring to a code which acquires its meaning through their action, the production created its own verbal code. It relied on the audience's familiarity with the translation of *Hamlet* in order to bring about a fresh response to the narrative, and to the tone developed through performance. It frustrated preconceived reactions of the spectators, and culled out from its surroundings a Shakespearean line which still carried its original connotations, but was, at the same time, tinged with its new verbal context. For example, when "To be or not to be" was followed by a line other than any from its original speech—here the audience was required to identify the transition—the line of thought it generated was counteracted by the connotations set off by the ensuing text. Frequently, the device had a shocking effect: it mocked the tragic world of *Hamlet*, while still preserving its tragic tone. In performance, the combination of two different texts allowed sharp and sudden transitions from one mode of presentation to another: the action often jumped from comedy to tragedy and vice versa.

While the linguistic argument was what impressed in the production, the

Shakespeare-Stoppard : *Hamlet*, by the Teatar ITD, Zagreb, Yugoslavia, January 1982, directed and designed by Zlatko Bourek, translated and adapted by Damir Munitic, music by Neven Franges.

use of puppets brought in pleasure and delight. They were of half-human height and operated by actors-animators who were dressed from head to toe in white and sat on white cube-like seats, supported by three small wheels. The puppets had glossy, painted faces (Hamlet, Claudius and Polonius were black-faced; Ophelia's red face had white clown-like make-up), and were colourfully dressed in predominantly black and bright red costumes, with white ruff collars. By moving his legs, which were also the legs of his puppet, an animator could move around, while still remaining in a sitting position. While a puppeteer used one of his hands to make gestures with the puppet's arm, with another he held a stick, inside the puppet's body, which was connected with the puppet's lips and grotesquely elongated movable nose. This last device increased the expressivity of the puppets and was used to a great extent. A series of well developed, distinguishing details brought life and individuality to the characters.

Claudius was quickly recognized as a clever politician: his gestures were well controlled and accompanied his words with a measured ease. After hearing of his father's death, Laertes rushed onto the stage with great speed and started frantically swinging with his arm clutching a club. Ophelia twittered like a coquette and moved her red-stockinged legs to a seductive pose. In the funeral scene Laertes communicated his grief by suddenly touching his forehead. The Ghost and the dead characters were the tallest—they were animated by actors in standing positions. The teeth of the guards in the opening scene rattled loudly, causing laughter in the audience. When Polonius was killed he and his animator were covered with a white sheet and wheeled off the stage by another actor. In the closet scene the Queen was looking into a hand mirror as if asking who the most beautiful was in the world. Ophelia's funeral was visually the most impressive scene: four puppets brought on a hearse and lowered it on the floor, centre stage left. The King and the Queen followed, while Yorick (a speaking part)—presented as a skull on a stick—performed a dance around the hearse. The fencing in the last scene was carried out with speed and great skill. Two large black cushions which lay on the floor, downstage left and right, became two graves as Laertes and Hamlet dropped down, one on each.

The stage was bare, its floor and backdrop immaculately white. It was fully lit throughout the performance and suggested a clinically cold place uninhabited by man. The characters appeared alienated from their surroundings, exposed to the audience's scrutiny. When Claudius whispered "Light, light," the words sounded like a search for a hiding place, which the bright, empty stage unmercifully denied.

Music played an important part in establishing the atmosphere and

underlining the action. Cymbals opened the play on a pompous note, a funeral march accompanied the scene in the graveyard, and drum beats fiercely gathering in momentum announced the end.

The violence and speed of the narrative (thirty-five minutes was the performance time) well suited the puppets whose exaggerated gestures emanated farcical cruelty. The vigour of the performance and ruthless alternations between comic and tragic, created a carnival-like world which playfully laughed at its own seriousness. The rough, larger-than-life style of the presentation was in accordance with the boldness of the linguistic argument. Violent juxtapositions of the translations of Shakespeare and Stoppard resulted in the simultaneous activation of the two texts. In other words, the production proposed a reading of *Hamlet* via *The Dogg's troupe 15-Minute*—it played the tragedy under the pretence of a comedy. Its real achievement was in finding a stage correlative for its intertextual game.

VESNA PISTOTNIK

The BBC *Hamlet*, a Television Production

With *Hamlet*, the producers of the BBC Shakespeare Plays have finally met the demands of Shakespeare-on-television by choosing a relatively bare set, conceding only a few richly detailed movable panels and props to shape key locales. By avoiding both location and realistic settings, they point up the natural affinity between Shakespeare's stage and the undisguised sound set. This starkness of setting admits poetry, heightened intensity—and "what not that's sweet and happy."

The producers have thus made a valid choice from among television's three faces: one, broadcast films, whether made for television or not, which exploit location settings, long shots, and all the clichés we associate with movies, including sudden shifts of space and time and full use of distance, from the most extreme long shots to "eyes only" closeups; two, studio-shot television drama with naturalistic settings, such as the hospital corridors and middle-class living rooms of sitcoms and soap operas, mostly in mid-to close-shots, often interspersed, to be sure, with a bit of stock footage of highways and skylines to establish a realistic environment. This second style varies from a close representation of real action to frankly staged action, where canned laughter or even shadowy glimpses of the studio audience can heighten the staged effect. Three, there is bare space with little or no effort made to disguise that this is a televised activity with a television crew out of sight but nearby. News broadcasts, talk shows and some television drama fit into this third category. Because of its patently unrepresentational quality, this last type offers the most freedom in shooting style. To all three kinds of settings we bring particular expectations in response to their conventions.

Shakespeare's plays work best in the last kind of television space, I believe, because it avoids the clash between realism and poetry, between the unity often expected in realistic media and the disunity and ambiguity of many of the plays, especially *Hamlet*. Yet, while closest to the kind of stage Shakespeare wrote for, the bare television set can be stretched

Text cited: *The Shakespeare Plays: Hamlet*, John Wilders, Literary Consultant [text: *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Alexander, 1951], a BBC TV and Time Life Television Coproduction (New York: Mayflower Books Inc., 1980; London: The British Broadcasting Company, 1980). For review of this text see below pp. 116-17.

Credits: Director, Rodney Bennett; Script Editor, Alan Shallcross; Producer, Cedric Messina, Designer, Don Homfray; with Derek Jacobi (*Hamlet*), Claire Bloom (*Gertrude*), Eric Porter (*Polonius*), Patrick Stewart (*Claudius*), Patrick Allen (*Ghost*), Emrys James (*First Player*), Lalla Ward (*Ophelia*), Robert Swann (*Horatio*), and David Robb (*Laertes*).

through creative camera work. For example, when Hamlet follows the ghost in the BBC play, the two repeatedly walk across the frame and out of it, first from one direction, then from another; framing fosters the illusion of extended space. Freeing this *Hamlet* from location (as in the BBC *As You Like It*) and from realistic sets (as in the BBC *Measure for Measure*—however well those sets worked for that play) allows the play to be as inconsistent as it is, with, as Bernard Beckerman has so brilliantly explained in *Shakespeare at the Globe, 1599-1609*, a rising and falling action in each individual scene rather than through the course of the drama as a whole. It also allows for *acting*, the bravura kind that Derek Jacobi is so capable of.

Although gradually coalescing like the pointillism of impressionistic paintings into a subtly textured portrait, at first his mannerisms suggesting madness seem excessive. It is to be expected, perhaps, that Hamlet is a bit unhinged after the ghost scene, but Jacobi's rapid, hard blows to his forehead with the flat of his hand as he says "My tables" recall the desperation of Lear's cry: "O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven." And soon after, following the last couplet of the scene, Hamlet maniacally playful, widens his eyes and points, pretending to see the ghost again, then guffaws at Marcellus's fears. Even more unsettling is his laughter when he is alone, as while he is saying "The play's the thing/Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King." More significantly, he breaks up his own "Mousetrap" by getting right into the play, destroying the distance between audience and stage (a very real raked proscenium-arch stage), spoiling it as a test, because Claudius has a right to be incensed at Hamlet's behaviour. Of course, Hamlet does so because Claudius never gives himself away, an unusual and provocative but not impossible interpretation. Thus, Claudius can only have the court's sympathy as he calmly calls for light and uses it to examine Hamlet closely. Hamlet, in response, covers his face, then laughs.

Hamlet himself thinks he is mad. To Ophelia he says, as if the realization had suddenly struck him, "It *hath* [emphasis his] made me mad" (3.1.147). To his mother he stresses the word "essentially" in "I, *essentially*, am not in madness" (3.4.187). That is, in all essential matters he can be considered sane, though mad around the edges. This indeed turns out to be the explanation.

However doubtful about Hamlet's sanity Jacobi's acting leaves us, in this production this question does not seem to make a difference because it does not have a bearing on the tragedy, and this is true at least partly because in each scene on this non-realistic set we seem to start anew, ready to let Hamlet's behavior tell us if he is mad or not. Moreover, if Hamlet is mad, it is not so totally as to obscure reason or sensibility. Far from it.

It is more as if exacerbated reason and sensibility sometimes tip him into madness. This madness is no excuse for action or delay; it is simply part of the suffering that Hamlet is heir to. This interpretation allows Hamlet to apologize to Laertes sincerely:

This presence knows,
 And you must needs have heard how I am punish'd
 With a sore distraction. What I have done
 That might your nature, honour, and exception,
 Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
 Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet.
 If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
 And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
 Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
 Who does it then? His madness. If't be so,
 Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong'd;
 His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.
 Sir, in this audience,
 Let my disclaiming from a purpos'd evil
 Free me so far in your most generous thoughts
 That I have shot my arrow o'er the house
 And hurt my brother.

(5.2.220-36).

This speech, at the important verge between prose and the poetry that sweeps to the end of the play, would be an embarrassment if Hamlet were only pretending madness, as in so many other performances. Yet if he is mad, how can he make those choices required if a figure is to be considered tragic? This production solves the problem by having it both ways; a few significant moments prove his "essential" sanity. Throughout "To be or not to be," though he is infinitely sad, he reasons calmly. And there is no sign of madness as he coolly judges himself after the players leave (2.2.560-83).

Not madness but aloneness is the enduring impression this Hamlet gives, an aloneness emphasized by the emptiness of the sets. He is isolated not only from the artifacts of existence (I am thinking here of the tapestries, desks, and instruments of the Evans and Kozintsev *Hamlets*, 1953 and 1964, respectively), but also from people. Unlike other Hamlets he is visible from the beginning of the first court scene (1.2), emphasizing his aloneness among a multitude. In most productions Hamlet either makes an entrance only after Laertes is leaving or he is seated so that he is barely noticeable. Here, he stands near the Queen at some distance from Claudius. Shots encompass a whole group so that as onstage we see the action and reactions of many at once. The King walks forward and takes

Gertrude's arm, leading her to the seat next to his—ignoring Hamlet, who is left in the foreground. Claudius then conducts the business of court. Fortinbras and Laertes are both disposed of before the King deigns to look at Hamlet, who is in clear sight all the while. To emphasize the slight, the director has Laertes far back in the crowd, surprised that Claudius calls out his name, having to push his way forward. The message to all is unmistakable and indeed no one in the crowd speaks to or recognizes Hamlet as they exit past him. Only Voltmand, Cornelius and Laertes had nodded slightly as they had left earlier. In a brilliant touch, by the way, Hamlet, turning to watch Laertes leave, has his back to Claudius when the King at last speaks to him. We thus see both full face.

A man who seems to choose solitude, Hamlet is all the more alone because of those around him. His chief friend, Horatio, played by Robert Swann, is strangely passive. True, Horatio has few lines but many directors give him feeling gestures that support Hamlet. Consider the Olivier film's Horatio who had presence enough to make him qualify as ruler of Denmark (in the absence of Fortinbras, omitted from that film). This is not conceivable for the BBC's non-entity. Occasionally Horatio does put a comforting hand on Hamlet's arm, but for the most part he is phlegmatically opaque and unreadable. Does he think that Hamlet should listen to the ghost? Does he think that Claudius gives himself away at the "Mousetrap"? Who can tell? His passionate declaration of loyalty at the end comes as a surprise. In the text, before the "Mousetrap," Hamlet calls out to Horatio, who immediately responds, entering the room (3.2.50-51). In the BBC version, as the frame widens after the advice to the players and Hamlet's few words with Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet moves downstage in the general lobby, approaches and speaks to a reading Horatio, whom he has to urge to look up and pay attention. At this moment, Hamlet praises him (3.2.52-72)—as if for his very lack of attention! The point seems to be that Horatio is no fawning flunky. But this interpretation for Hamlet's speech ("a man that Fortune's buffets and rewards/Hast ta'en with equal thanks") detracts from its profounder meaning for Hamlet's own growth of awareness. Yet the interaction certainly does reinforce the concept of Hamlet alone.

The point that Rodney Bennett, the director, seems to make here would have been more telling if Rosencrantz and Guildenstern had acted as toadies previously. But they have not. From the beginning, they have decided where the seat of power is, and they appear to have little interest in Hamlet. The shot that introduces them effectively reveals their nature: a long shot of King and Queen approaching the camera, framed by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in medium closeup. They nudge each other

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as they notice they are no longer alone; put on your mask, the nudge says. More subtle Rosencrantzes and Guildensterns in other productions descend into perfidy and thus the directors imply that their disintegration is brought about by Claudius. But this character development would not fit this production's Claudius. During their first interview with Hamlet, a low angle shot of them standing puts them in the position of judges over the seated Hamlet. They are cool, with an unfeeling response to Hamlet's tearful, distraught cry, "I have had bad dream," and after the "Mousetrap" they cannot conceal their disdain. Hamlet however, suffers no great loss of friendship in them because obviously his mother is wrong in saying "two men there is not living / To whom he more adheres," for in a neat reversal of the frequent stage joke, Hamlet (not Claudius) mistakes one for the other. And though he greets them warmly, it is not at all like his fervent embrace of Horatio.

Even the First Player is not a friend or a comfort to Hamlet. He treats Hamlet with impatience as a nuisance or humors him. 3.2, for example, begins with a shot of hands making up the boy as Queen—that is, after a graceful allusion to Olivier's *Hamlet*, with a shot of theatrical props. The first player enters and with the frame widening we see that those are Hamlet's hands; the player sighs wearily as he cleans Hamlet's hands, then listens with barely concealed condescension to Hamlet's advice.

And Lalla Ward's Ophelia is too mousey and insignificant to be a friend to Hamlet. Laertes's and Polonius's advice to her rings true because what could a man like Hamlet see in this weak-chinned, insipid little girl? True, all Ophelias fail Hamlet, but not before leading him to expect a more spunky response. What else is the meaning of that long look at her that she reports to Polonius (2.1.75-100)? Like many other directors, this one omits Ophelia's playful answer to Hamlet at the "Mousetrap": "Still better and worse" (3.2.245).

Incidentally, Hamlet's sarcastic "Soft you now, the fair Ophelia," lends credence to Claudius's analysis of the nunnery scene—"Love! his affections do not that way tend" (3.1.162)—an analysis that rings all the more true because camera work makes clear that the King has overheard the "To be or not to be" speech as well as Hamlet's encounter with Ophelia (3.1.56-149). While onstage-characters normally cannot hear asides by other characters, one could overhear a soliloquy just as Romeo for example overhears Juliet. Because the camera frames not just Hamlet's face but the space behind him where Claudius and Polonius are hiding, we grasp that Claudius's later comment, "There's something in his soul/O'er which his melancholy sits on brood" (164-65) is based on his having heard Hamlet's soliloquy. This is a point that films often miss because with their

spatial flexibility they can place Hamlet anywhere while he is making this speech. Hamlet in Kozintsev's version is watching water crash over rocks, and Olivier is on the ramparts of the castle (the speech transposed to after the nunnery scene to boot). So the very limitations of space can reinforce the connections that Shakespeare intended.

Not only the nature of his friends but also of Hamlet's enemies tends to isolate him. Polonius, played by Eric Porter, is basically a good sort, well-meaning and affectionate with Ophelia. He hugs her sympathetically after she tells him about what happened as she was sewing in her closet, and he tenderly leads her away after the nunnery scene. Even his foolishness is diminished as the director has him read off the genres from the players' own bill rather than having Polonius invent them from his own too hair-splitting brain. Claudius, played by Patrick Stewart, is handsome, clear-eyed, seemingly guileless, a genial King whose repugnance for his misdeed expresses itself in such physical revulsion that he sobs out his remorse. Unfortunately, the American broadcast version of 3.3 omitted Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Polonius, thus eliminating Claudius's "Thanks, dear my lord," which Claudius could barely articulate, because he almost retches out of self-loathing. He is a good man sullied by one bad act. Since the production does not overemphasize the closeup, seen by many to be the primary television shot, the extreme closeup of Claudius when he whispers his *first* admission of guilt (3.1.49-54) had been striking and effective because such a shocking contradiction to what his demeanor had led us to believe. That Gertrude cleaves to Claudius is not surprising, once Hamlet has left. However, Claire Bloom playing Gertrude makes incredible the idea of shallow sensuality. Loving, self-possessed, she is almost too intelligent to play the Queen. These enemies, good people all, do not give Hamlet sufficient resistance to push against.

Hamlet, then, is left to struggle against himself—surely where Shakespeare intended the struggle to abide. One of the conflicts in this Hamlet results from his affinity, perhaps, more to the bureaucratic Claudius who handles war-scares with diplomacy and who sits at a desk while brooding over his sin; than to the warlike King Hamlet who comes in full armor. Hamlet may admire Fortinbras but is himself more like the bookish Horatio. Through nuance of gesture, through body movement, through a face that is indeed a map of all emotions, Jacobi shapes a Hamlet who loves his father too much to disregard his command, yet who cannot hate his step-father enough to attend to it. Because Jacobi conveys so fully Hamlet's aloneness and vulnerability, one could be struck, for the first time, by the ghost's silence about his son. There is no declaration of love, no concern about Hamlet's ascension to the throne. Hamlet is doomed, it seems, to care about those who consistently care more for others than for him.

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All of this production's richness and suggestiveness was realized not only because Jacobi is a marvelous actor—as indeed he is—but also because within the set's sparseness *that* acting could unfold, an acting style that subsumes and transcends the "real." This production's space tells us what is possible for television presentations of Shakespeare. The more bare the set, it seems, the more glowing the words, the more immediate our apprehension of the enacted emotion.

Settings

I. Bare Raked Stage

Wooden acting area with ramps, cyclorama. 1.1, 1.4, and 1.5: fog and wind sounds; 1.3: bright light and sea sounds; 4.4: mausoleum-like structure and grave on stage.

II. Paneled Spaces

Type A, very dark panels with hint of black brocade; long, vertical openings; suggestion of light and space beyond. 1.2: rug, two throne chairs, candlestick; 3.2: addition of the proscenium-arch stage for players; 4.6: table with Horatio and others sitting; 5.2: Hamlet and Horatio sitting at a table; then a cut, but same space for fencing match.

Type B, 2.1, and 4.7: the most intimate space, the interior of Polonius's home. Wood panels, no doorways, just openings where light from another space can be seen. Crosshatchings on the panels, some with paintings. A large chest, candlestick, a small desk with artifacts on it.

Type C, 2.2.1-216, 3.1, and 4.5: wood panels with arches, paintings within, space beyond with additional taller panels—looks in fact like *Type A* with the addition of the wooden panels to form a somewhat more intimate space.

Type D, 3.3, and 4.3: similar to *Type C*, the King's study with desk and altar.

Type E, 2.2.217-end: meant to be just outside *Type A*; light and shadows suggest trees; marble benches.

Type F, 3.4, and 4.1: the Queen's closet; three sets of tan, brocade drapes delineating the closet itself, the area where Polonius hides, and the bed on which Hamlet throws the Queen.

BERNICE W. KLIMAN

The McCarter Theatre Company's *Hamlet*

This production of *Hamlet* was one of the most effective I have ever seen, but I think that that effectiveness was achieved in spite of the reasons offered by the director in his program note. According to Nagle Jackson, Hamlet is "a Romantic Hero" who was incomprehensible until Romanticism arrived at the end of the eighteenth century. Before that time he had been "a puzzle for over a century." Two centuries would be better arithmetic, but the profusion of seventeenth century allusions to Hamlet indicates that Hamlet's popularity was second only to Falstaff's. That Hamlet is a romantic hero one hardly need go to Princeton to learn.

Jackson also says that Hamlet is "a hero who would not conform to patterns," would never have registered for a draft, presumably, and here is where the contemporary relevance comes in. The revolt of American youth against the establishment during the late 1960s and the 1970s has often been compared to such Romantic revolt as one sees in Shelley and Byron, especially in the accompanying irrationality and irresponsibility which are overreactions to the obvious abuses of authority. Some of all this may have some relevance, but most of it is mere window dressing. The success of the play has much more to do with its archetypal familial situations, and the success of any particular production depends upon how it is played.

In this production the text has been cut to three hours playing time. All references to Fortinbras and Norway have been cut. Conversations with Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Horatio and Osric have been heavily cut as well, and so also the bedroom scene, the long conspiratorial interview of Claudius and Laertes, and the watches on the platform, including the mole of nature speech. But the four great soliloquies are retained, and all the best passages of poetry in those scenes which have been reduced. The result is a much faster-moving, unencumbered plot that keeps its emphasis upon emotion.

The visual setting of this pared text is the relatively bare and schematic stage: three moving panels to suggest walls, a big sky at the back, and a trapdoor for the ghost. Now and then a double throne. Little else. It's a happy relief from such a production as Zeffirelli's *Romeo*, where the visual opulence constantly swamps the poetry.

Hamlet. Presented by the McCarter Theatre Company, Princeton, New Jersey, October 27—November 14, 1982. Director, Nagle Jackson; Scenery, Daniel Boylen; Costumes, Susan Rheume; Lighting, Richard Moore.

Principal Cast: *Hamlet*, Harry Hamlin; *Claudius*, Neil Vipond; *Gertrude*, Jill Tanner; *Polonius*, Jay Doyle; *Laertes*, Gary Roberts; *Ophelia*, Stacy Ray; *Horatio*, Darryl Croxton; *Ghost*, Robert Lanchester,

What carried the play through all three hours was the superb acting of Harry Hamlin as Hamlet. He was immensely variable: imperious at some times, contemplative at others, sitting and writhing with frustration and loathing, cursing and railing at Polonius or Claudius, but at all times delivering the lines with such clarity and with such perfectly native variation of stress and intonation that he made the most familiar passages sound as alive as spontaneous speech. It was at these times that the audience fell into such rapt attention that in the pauses of his speech, no sound was to be heard anywhere in the house. Time and again that happened; during all four soliloquies, during the ghost appearances, the foyer scene, the prayer scene, and the bedroom scene.

This domination of the play by Hamlet had an unnecessary price. The other persons of the drama, all of whom have characters of their own, were reduced drastically, sometimes to mere speaking sticks that walked on and off. Claudius was neither oily nor efficient. He merely stood up, like a tenpin, until he was downed. Gertrude was somewhat regal and distant, a suitable Lady Capulet, but no one affectionate, tolerant or indolent enough to justify Hamlet's railing. Horatio lost his simple-minded trust in Hamlet and philosophy, Guildenstern the conscience that differentiates him from Rosencrantz, Polonius most of his fatuity, along with his beard, which went to the barber's before the play began, and Laertes most of his headstrong brainlessness. Only little Ophelia survived, a green girl in a plain green gown, which she wore on into her galloping mad scenes, and which she must have changed later for a cartload of petticoats to go get drowned in. Ophelia was the only other player besides Hamlet who reduced the audience to that absolute silence.

A bad result of the centralization of attention upon Hamlet was that the audience did much conspicuous rustling whenever Hamlet was offstage (with the exception of Ophelia's mad scenes noted above). While it may be that such a price is not too much to pay for a superbly effective Hamlet, I don't think audience attention should be allowed to sag so much. This was a simplified version of the play, not because of the cuts, but because the other characters were not so alive as Shakespeare evidently conceived them.

Some minor virtues and faults should also be noticed. In the first scene the cock crows not once but three times, electrically amplified, and the third time from the back of the house so loud that it sounded like a rooster twelve feet high.

When Polonius forgets what he has been telling Reynaldo, it's because he has heard Ophelia scream offstage. Knowing the play, we infer that Hamlet has, at least, got into her closet. The uncertainty of the whole

truth of Ophelia's subsequent narration is thereby removed.

In the second scene Claudius and Gertrude appeared in long, mauve robes spattered around the bottoms with gold paint. We infer at once their sensuality and crimes.

Both the dumb show and the play (abbreviated) were presented. During the first, Claudius and Gertrude whispered and quite missed the poisoning of the king. During the play, however, Claudius was possessed with a constantly rising agitation which was fascinating to watch.

In the last act the fencing of Hamlet and Laertes was extraordinarily fast and ferocious-looking. The best fencing I've seen, for too often it looks as though the actors had started their fencing practice only last week.

In brief, this production was most memorable for the superb acting of Harry Hamlin and for his complex, genuinely noble, and so-called Romantic conception of the character. He was far better than Jacobi in the recent BBC version, and better than Olivier in his cinematic version of thirty years ago. We may hope that Hamlin will play the role again some time with a stronger or unleashed supporting cast.

GORDON ROSS SMITH

REVIEWS

A Review of Periodical Articles (1981-2)

That rites, if not customs, must be more honoured in the observance than the breach is the contention which underlies the arguments in this year's major articles. Henri Suhamy¹ considers the Ghost from an anthropological perspective (albeit a not very rigorous one), emphasizing the power of primitive feelings associated with ghosts in the human imagination: "Les fantômes appartiennent au domaine public et familier, il suffit de se rafraîchir la mémoire." Ghosts are in the world, but not of it: they are a dreadful manifestation of our fear of death. This common-sense approach to the issue of the likely response of the contemporary audience to the Ghost is, like much in this essay, sensible and true to a play whose most sensible character the Ghost harrows with fear and wonder. Suhamy questioningly places against each other the human necessity for proper funeral rites and Hamlet's reluctance to carry out the specific rite ordained by the Ghost, that of vengeance. He finds the answer in the questionable shape: Hamlet's "attitude envers le fantôme reflète également le sentiment collectif, il est logique d'y trouver de la crainte." The Ghost demands a particular rite as the testimony of the living to the dead; but the Ghost is also implicitly a harbinger of death to the living: a nice conflict is thereby created in Hamlet between continuance of life and recognition of death. This is not an article to revise radically our view of the play; but one to confirm our sense of its humanity. Appropriately, Suhamy's manner is modest and engaging, but quietly insists on the importance of the Ghost's part in "les rites immémoriaux de l'humanité."

The proper funeral rites for Hamlet's father have, as Peter Sacks² reminds us, been truncated. Yet human nature demands that something be said and done in the face of death. Like Suhamy, Sacks combines a concern for rites with an anthropological approach, citing Durkheim and emphasizing how revenge can be seen as a means of discharge for the anger of survivors. What has happened by the end of the sixteenth century is that agents of the state have taken this function over from the individual,

¹Henri Suhamy, "Une Histoire de Fantôme Intitulée *Hamlet*: Quelques considérations anthropologiques," *Etudes Anglaises*, 35, no. 1 (Janvier-Mars, 1952), 1-12.

²Peter Sacks, "Where Words Prevail Not: Grief, Revenge, and Language in Kyd and Shakespeare," *ELH*, 49, no. 3 (Fall, 1982), 576-601.

and yet there is little confidence felt in the legal system so constituted. Nor can words, rather than deeds, serve the human need, for the traditions of pastoral elegy are in decline, as witness the way in which revenge tragedy often refers to "the perversion of a consoling pastoral world." The result is that language and action are both uncertain: the "solacing powers of pastoral continued to diminish as the political and religious uncertainties of the age deepened." Generalizations about an "age" (whatever that abstract term might mean) are always suspicious; but Sacks uses them to good purpose. He examines *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* in dark terms, before considering *Hamlet* as taking the crisis towards resolution. The process of the play, he suggests, is the gradual restoration of Hamlet's confidence in language, gained through such instances as observation of the power of fictional representation (the Gonzago play), of the ability of rhetoric to force Gertrude to a crisis of conscience, and of the might of the pen in altering Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's commission. Growth in confidence in the efficacy of words is reflected in Hamlet's final wish that Horatio tell his story (public language, rather than the self-contempt of the soliloquy), and paralleled by his acquiescence in a divine design. The play thus emerges as a very hopeful, positive process ("from vengeful to elegiac pursuits, from action to language") in this good, clear essay. As with Suhamy, however, the result is useful support to existing ideas, not any really new insight.

Lynda E. Boose³ seeks to be more ambitious, but with mixed results. Her wide-ranging essay addresses father-daughter relationships in Shakespeare, which, she says, generally depend on "significant underlying substructures of ritual" (where else would substructures be?), especially the marriage ceremony. At a wedding the father's bonds with his daughter are dissolved and yet, at the same time, memorialized and so paradoxically reasserted. This smacks of a basically true idea turning gradually into near-falsity through over-elaboration. Such a suspicion is, perhaps, confirmed in the first of her two *Hamlet* examples. The nunnery scene is an "inverted marriage ceremony" in which the 'bride's' father is hidden, not open, and Ophelia returns gifts rather than receiving a ring. So far this does sharpen one's view of the scene, but the development of the idea protests too much: when Hamlet asks "Where's your father?" he is demanding that Ophelia choose between father and 'husband', so that her reply, "At home, my lord," indicates "her own inability to break away from the weighty bonds of home and father." Ophelia's reply seems more likely to shock an audience as a lie, so bringing into prominence the issue of truth

³Lynda E. Boose, "The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 97. no. 3 (May, 1982), 325-47.

and falsehood. Boose's second instance, though, works better. At the funeral of Ophelia, Laertes and Hamlet play out a mock marriage ceremony for the dead body of Ophelia, so that we are aware of two opposed rituals (burial and wedding) in violent collision, with the result that both become polluted. This view of the effect of the rivalry between Laertes and Hamlet does seem close to the dramatic realities of the scene: it is, after all, the play's own dramatic ritual which is the appropriate critical touchstone.

Such was the criterion by which last years's review, regular readers may recall, questioned the real value of Cherell Guilfoyle's pursuit of typological meanings in *Hamlet*. A third essay by her has appeared,⁴ and this, let it be at once said, is the most interesting of the series. Rejecting Wilson Knight's 'romantic' view of Claudius, she argues that he possesses characteristics reminiscent of traditional portrayals of Antichrist. Claudius links himself with the eternally damned Cain; and the curious fact that he is not actually named in the text does allow for Guilfoyle's conclusion that, as Antichrist, he usurps "the very name of God himself." More readers may balk at the way in which Fortinbras is made to fit the system. His name, she posits, is linked with the powers of darkness through the "Fierabras" or "Bras-de-Fer" who is the Moorish steward of Antichrist in the twelfth-century *Tourneiment Anticrist*; while "Ferumbras," the giant son of Satan in the Charlemagne romances, descends from the north like Gog, whose hostile power unleashes itself immediately before the end of the world. So "Gog and Fortinbras bring down their conquering armies from the north, to gather up the spoil." Add that the grave scene of 5.1 echoes the Last Judgement of the Mystery Cycle, when figures rise from graves, and that the reference to Hamlet's age in the same scene could be related to Christ's age typologically at the crucifixion, and the pattern is complete. The argument is impressively ingenious, but dangerously strained. Who will really be convinced that Hamlet's cry of "Here, thou incestuous, murd'rous, damned Dane" evokes Adso's attribution of Antichrist to the tribe of Dan? The article makes fascinating reading, but. . .

To turn from Guilfoyle to such a statement as that Hamlet "is at once the most and least self-conscious of Shakespeare's tragic heroes" is to turn from telling too much to keeping too much counsel. This is the problem in Barry Weller's⁵ application to *Hamlet* of his notion that Shakespeare often presents us with "characters in quest of self-representation, who seek not only to occupy the space of the stage but to impress a cer-

⁴Cherell Gullfoyle, "King Hamlet's Two Successors," *Comparative Drama*, 15, no. 2 (Summer, 1981), 120-38.

⁵Barry Weller, "Identity and Representation in Shakespeare," *ELH*, 49, no. 2 (Summer, 1982), 339-62.

tain vision of themselves upon the world." This is a good and useful idea, founded upon a view of the drama as a more realistic form than psychologically analytic prose fiction, because "it reproduces the circumstances under which human beings ordinarily meet and know each other—as appearances, not as essences, through intuition and surmise, not through certain and immediate entry into another consciousness." This is true enough, but, when specifics are encountered, the perceptions become rather diffused. To say that the disjunction between Hamlet's illusionistic dialogue and chorus-like monologue relates to the play's questioning of the relationship between abstract moral maxims and the individual agent is not really a sharp enough application of the problematic nature of dramatic self-representation. Weller has more searching things to say about the early comedies, and the lack of development may be a result of lack of space. Let us hope that he, or someone, returns to the matter.

Modest, but helpfully progressive approaches are, then, the best that this year has to offer. Typifying this, in a small way, is Roland Mushat Frye's⁶ continuation of his exploration of the visual background to *Hamlet* (see the review of 1979 articles). His considerations of Hamlet's inky cloak by means of illustrations of sixteenth-century funeral processions (with a clever and revealing use of photomontage), of Ophelia's burial, of Claudius's reference to "the painting of a sorrow," and of Hamlet's view of his father as a conjunction of Mars and Mercury are all quietly and pleasantly enlightening. On a different tack, Ilona Bell's⁷ note on Horatio's reply to the Ambassador concerning the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is equally helpful. She suggests that an audience naturally assumes that, when Horatio tells the Ambassador that he would receive thanks "Not from his mouth,/Had it th'ability of life to thank you," he is oddly beginning his responsibility for restoring Hamlet's wounded name with a lie; but that such an assumption is based on a grammatical ambiguity. Unlike the audience, the Ambassador believes that the order came from Claudius, not Hamlet. Horatio quick-wittedly realizes this and responds correctly: no thanks would have been forthcoming from Claudius because "He never gave commandment for their death." That Horatio judges the situation so well emphasizes his trustworthiness. That the audience is temporarily deceived provides another lesson in seeming and being. Bell clearly explicates a small point, but one whose implications are significant.

⁶Roland Mushat Frye, "'Looking Before and After': The Use of Visual Evidence and Symbolism for Interpreting Hamlet," *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 45, no. 1 (Winter, 1982), 1-19.

⁷Ilona Bell, "The Ambiguity of Horatio's 'Story': *Hamlet*, V. ii.352-9," *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 29, no. 2 (April, 1982), 118-9.

Michael Cameron Andrews⁸ provides a usefully confirmatory note. Harold Jenkins in the Arden edition points out that 3.4 takes place (*pace* the Olivier film and many a production) in Gertrude's closet, not her bedroom. Andrews dismisses the bedroom as "a vulgar error," and presents convincing evidence that by a closet is meant either "A room for privacy or retirement" (*OED* 1) or "The private apartment of a monarch or potentate; the private council-chamber" (*OED* 2). He cites a number of instances from other Shakespeare plays to prove his point and, best of all, refers to the marriages of Henry VIII to Jane Seymour and Catherine Parr (not at the same time) as having taken place "in the Queen's closet." Andrews drily comments that "we cannot accuse even Henry of making wedding and bedding the double business of a single room." Let us hear no more of bedroom scenes. Another note which receives some support from Jenkins comes from Derick R.C. Marsh.⁹ When Hamlet tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he is "most dreadfully attended," it seems scarcely relevant that Hamlet should be grumbling about his lack of a retinue, which is the usual interpretation. Where Jenkins wonders whether there is here a further allusion to the dreams that haunt Hamlet's mind, Marsh more assertively points out how the word "dread" has become associated with the Ghost, and convincingly suggests that *OED*'s primary meaning ("with terror, fear, awe or apprehension"), rather than *OED* 3 (the colloquial 'awfully', where the *Hamlet* example is actually cited) applies to the case. As Marsh says, it could be that the ostensible meaning is for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the private meaning for Hamlet himself and the audience. This serves to enrich the play at this point.

Other notes are less impressive. R.L. Horn¹⁰ defends Q2's "And do such business as the bitter day" over F1's "And do such bitter business as the day" in Hamlet's soliloquy at the end of 3.2. Maurice Charney has previously argued that the bitter day is doomsday, and Horn (a la Guilfoyle) cites medieval instances of the usage, while directing our attention to the immediately preceding image of graves yielding their occupants. But, as Jenkins notes, the real antithesis is between day and night: the rhetoric supports F1. Only those who want to insist on the significant presence of doomsday in the play would argue for Q2. Martin Coyle¹¹ argues that the king of Norway is not hastily introduced in 1.2 in

⁸Michael Cameron Andrews, "His Mother's Closet: A Note on *Hamlet*," *Modern Philology*, 80, no. 2 (November, 1982), 164-6.

⁹Derick R.C. Marsh, "A Note on Hamlet's 'I Am Most Dreadfully Attended' (II.ii. 266)," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1982), 181-2.

¹⁰R.L. Horn, "*Hamlet*, III. ii. 376: A Defence of Q2's 'The Bitter Day,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1982), 179-81.

¹¹Martin Coyle, "Shakespeare's *Hamlet*," *The Explicator*, 40, no. 3 (Spring, 1982), 13.

order to end the war between Fortinbras and Denmark. He suggests that we read the phrase, "the skirts of Norway," in 1.1 as meaning "the parts of an army furthest distant from the centre or main body" (*OED* III. 7.c), the army in question being that of the king of Norway. So what Horatio is telling the soldiers is that Fortinbras has drawn his lawless resolute from his uncle's forces. It is difficult to imagine an audience, which has just heard Horatio talk of "Norway" in a context that obviously makes sense as referring to the country, interpreting this phrase as meaning anything other than "the outlying parts of Norway, the nation." The mention of the king comes in appropriately enough in 1.2 where we see a more central uncle and nephew on stage. Horst Breuer's¹² attempted resolution of the opening of "To be or not to be" in terms of a metaphor of siege also achieves little. In the "sea of troubles" he suggests, Shakespeare images hostile soldiers as waves dashing against a castle rock. Man is a fortified city under continual attack from the enemy, and his dilemma is whether to hold out stoically, only to be eventually overwhelmed, or to make a gallant, if hopeless, sortie. This serves only to reduce the impact of the hopelessness in the face of natural forces, a sense which "sea of troubles" captures exactly.

Two articles of minor interest to students of *Hamlet* are worth mentioning. Gilbert Youmans¹³ analyses the syntactic inversions in the play which serve a metrical function. He successfully proves that "syntactic inversions are indeed valid, highly pertinent indicators of underlying metrical principles." The larger part of the article is concerned with an examination of metrical theories propounded by Morris Halle, Samuel Jay Keyser and Paul Kiparsky, Youmans finding in favour of Kiparsky, though with the additional point that there are enough exceptions to his rule (which involves a shift in stressed syllables in polysyllabic words from positions 7 and 9 in the 10-syllable line) to conclude that it defines "sufficient conditions for iambic poetry, but not necessary ones." *Hamlet* is simply Youmans's test-case, and so nothing is revealed specifically about the play; but attention to such technicalities is important and could become fruitful. A.P. Stabler¹⁴ takes issue with an earlier article by Theresa Suriano Ormsby-Lennon in which she argues that aspects of the closet scene derive from Remigio Nannini's *Orationi in materia civile* of 1561 where a summary of part of the *Hamlet* story can be found. Stabler

¹²Horst Breuer, "Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, III. i. 56-88," *The Explicator*, 40, no. 3 (Spring, 1982), 14-15.

¹³Gilbert Youmans, "Hamlet's Testimony on Kiparsky's Theory of Meter," *Neophilologus*, 66, no. 4 (October, 1982), 490-503.

¹⁴A.P. Stabler, "Hamlet: an Italian Source?" *The Library Chronicle*, 45, nos. 1-2 (1981), 84-8.

finds misreadings of the Italian in Ormsby-Lennon's essay, and rejects her suggestion that, in stylistics and ideas, Nannini is closer to Shakespeare than is the corresponding text of Belleforest. The present reviewer can only alert readers to the issue and retire, more or less graciously, from the field.

And where better to retire to than Joseph R. Roach, Jr.'s¹⁵ delightful piece on Garrick's wig? A wig-maker called Perkins designed, it would appear, a mechanical wig whose hairs would start up on cue when Garrick saw the Ghost. The article is, one must note, a serious one. Eighteenth-century scientific stress on the mechanical nature of the body's workings (as in Julien de la Mettrie's *Man a Machine*) derived from the Cartesian physiological model of how the rational soul moves the mechanism of the body. Aaron Hill's "system" of acting, in which he sought to ascertain "the natural foundation of that mechanism . . . whereby the springs are moved, to represent the passions, outwardly," follows the same principle. So, when Garrick saw the Ghost, Perkins's invention helped him to show the ghost in the machine directing the action of the bodily machine. It harrows me with fear and wonder . . .

W. HUTCHINGS

¹⁵Joseph R. Roach, Jr., "Garrick, the Ghost and the Machine," *Theatre Journal*, 34, no. 4 (December, 1982), 431-40.

The Mayflower *Hamlet*

Hamlet, the twelfth and final text of the Shakespeare Plays to be published in the United States by Mayflower Books Inc., New York, is a fine addition to the series. Now that WNET is no longer producing a "Viewer's Guide" for the BBC-TV/Time Life SHAKESPEARE PLAYS, the Mayflower text is in fact the best source for full credits and photographs. Warning: these photos are not necessarily taken from the production itself but are posed and recorded separately, giving some a curious air of detachment. The back cover, for example, shows Hamlet about to pour wine down the dying Claudius's throat as courtiers in the background look on with the mildest sort of interest. This particular frame was not in the broadcast. Nevertheless, the pictures are a ready-at-hand jog to the memory.

The *Hamlet* has the same useful features that we have enjoyed in the previous eleven texts. Alan Shallcross, the script editor, provides as it were a shooting script of the play by marking the cuts in the Peter Alexander text. These notes are an aid to understanding the director's original intentions, for the broadcast version that you see may be cut further, because of time constraints, as it was in the United States. On the other hand, the director, Rodney Bennett, reports that lines cut out in the script were sometimes replaced during rehearsals.

The "Preface" by Cedric Messina, Executive Producer of the series for the first two years, presents the overall plan and progress of the series so far, with some *Hamlet* text and production history. Messina states that Derek Jacobi's television performance seems to him to be a synthesis of two Jacobi stage performances, one in London and one in Tokyo, of the recent *Hamlet* production directed by Toby Robertson. But Messina also states, without explanation, that the television production reaffirmed for him that the theater experience and the television experience "of Shakespeare are totally different."

Next comes the "Introduction to Hamlet," eight pages. To write a short essay on *Hamlet* is probably one of the more challenging of literary tasks, but John Wilders, the literary consultant for the SHAKESPEARE PLAYS, gracefully outlines the play's problems and opportunities. It is a valuable overview and a good introduction for any student. He speaks for *Hamlet* the play, however, rather than for this particular production.

Henry Fenwick's piece on "The Production" clarifies this television production's aims and methods through comments from the principals, both those behind and those in the scenes. Rodney Bennett, an experienced television director, had never before directed Shakespeare. Moreover, as he admitted to the actors, he had no "theory about this play." Though the decision to use studio space rather than location settings had been made

for him, Bennett shaped the particular setting, influenced by *The Merchant of Venice*, starring Patrick Stewart (Claudius in the *Hamlet*) as Shylock, at the Warehouse theater, which used "the absolute minimum of furniture: no settings at all." Both Bennett and Don Homfray, the designer, "liked the idea of a stylized set," to emphasize and allow for the theatricality of the play. They built "ramps around the circumference of the acting space. . . . You can then get a cyc* beyond and you've got a ground level to hide your cyc lights. It gives you a big sense of space." Humphrey also discusses the interior spaces: "The walls are unsubstantial. . . . It's all ambiguous, dark, mysterious."

It's interesting that Lalla Ward (Ophelia), as quoted by Fenwick, is certain that Hamlet and Ophelia had not been having an affair (otherwise she would not have been so frightened during the nunnery scene), while Jacobi feels, as reported in the *Dial*, WNET's program guide, for November, that they had been. Oh well, that's not the first time such a thing has happened. Marianne Faithfull, too, disagreed with Nicol Williamson (Hamlet) on this point in the Tony Richardson production (1970).

Jacobi also speaks of the possibilities for Horatio on television, the opportunities the closeups offer for seeing him interact with *Hamlet*, for building "a relationship that is much more important and striking than on stage." Unfortunately, Robert Swann in this production remains so impassive that the intention cannot be realized and the closeups of him seem pointless.

The Mayflower text is full of interesting and illuminating tid-bits, such as that the production was captured on tape between 31 January and 8 February 1980 and that the BBC production lasted for three hours and 40 minutes (while the WNET broadcast was only three hours and 30 minutes). The type is easy to read, the paper is sturdy, and the 160-page book is comfortable in the hand. There are no footnotes to trouble or enlighten the reader. Instead there is a forty-seven page glossary by Graham May. While one would not want this as the only *Hamlet* text in one's possession, it certainly is a valuable adjunct to the television production and a pleasantly accessible book for students and instructors alike.

It is truly unfortunate that Mayflower has decided to stop publishing the plays. Since they will hold their stock, however, *Hamlet* and the other plays they have published will be available.

BERNICE W. KLIMAN

*"Cyclorama": *Webster's Second*, "In stagecraft, the curved cloth or wall forming the back of many modern settings, used to eliminate shadows and to suggest unlimited space, as of the sky."

The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies: Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear. By SUSAN SNYDER. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. Pp. 185.

These days the appearance of yet another book on Shakespearean tragedy is apt, perhaps forgivably, to arouse initial feelings of apprehension, satiety, or ennui, if not disgust. We instinctively wonder what junior academic, desperate to escape the guillotine of tenure denial, has this time rushed his ill-digested formulations into print for the benefit of a chairman or a dean. Susan Snyder's lucid, perceptive, wonderfully probing book instantly dissolves such smug expectations. Her essay bears the stamp of many years of reading, teaching, and reflecting on Shakespeare, and she combines generalization and evidence, logic and sensitivity, literary theory and practical criticism with such intelligence and tact that she has produced a model of sorts for less mature and thoughtful critics to emulate. Readers of this journal will be particularly interested in her exploration of *Hamlet*, but I must pause to observe that her other chapters are no less rewarding. This is a work whose intellectual frame is vital to the analyses of individual plays and in which the separate analyses themselves gain from and enrich each other.

Snyder argues that Shakespeare mastered comic before tragic form, and that his developing conception and practice of tragedy were profoundly informed by comic modes and conventions. Regarding tragedy as essentially a dramatic exploitation of our paradoxical feelings about death—our acceptance of its naturalness and inevitability on the one hand and our resistance to its “cutting off of human possibility” (p. 11) on the other—she skillfully elaborates major contrasts between traditionally comic and tragic expectations in the theatre to show how, in Shakespeare, these polar perspectives tend to encroach upon and modify each other. (Incidentally, “A World Elsewhere,” her chapter on the conventions of Elizabethan comedy, is the finest critical-historical synthesis of the issues I have yet encountered, and, like C. L. Barber's influential book on the festive aspects of Shakespearean design, will be indispensable to anyone who wishes to study the comedies seriously.) Deliberately, of course, Snyder draws her title for the discussion of comic attitudes from that most austere of tragedies, *Coriolanus*, for her emphasis is on the ways in which Shakespeare reshapes the materials and assumptions of the lighter genre to achieve new tragic effects. No summary of her wide-ranging and closely textured chapters can begin to give an adequate sense of their richness (every page offers a fresh insight or an illuminating association), but three distinctions central to her analyses and typical of her procedure may be mentioned here: the idea (1) that identities tend to multiply or shift

ground in comedy (as symbolized by disguises) but remain more stable or single in tragedy, (2) that comedy typically presents disparate worlds or spheres of value (as symbolized by differing social strands and levels of plot), and (3) that comedy usually celebrates life force (as symbolized by its drive toward coupling) rather than the individual virtue or moral dignity with which tragedy is most often concerned.

Snyder employs these and related distinctions to expose the comic matrices—not merely the separable “comic relief,” it should be noted—which she thinks lie at the core of Shakespeare’s tragic form. Thus both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, deriving, as they do, from the traditions of the novella or short story, “use the world of romantic comedy as a point of departure” (p. 56). The former drama only *becomes* tragic when the lovers are fatally victimized by the game-like world in which they must play out their mating, and the proliferation of comic or potentially comic characters (old Capulet, Benvolio, Mercutio, the Nurse, Friar Laurence) is symptomatic of the play’s generic orientation. Mercutio’s death marks the transition to the grimmer world of tragic pressure and so symbolizes the death of comedy. *Othello* again makes use of comic conventions (lovers who must overcome parental and societal objections, a wisecracking manipulator whose schemes, unlike Friar Laurence’s, actually succeed), but here “destruction comes” (as it does not in the earlier play) “from inside”—“inside Othello and inside the assumptions of romantic love” (p. 70). Shakespeare explores the “deeply tragic implications” of “the conventional dichotomy between reason and love,” but here “the angle of vision has changed” so as to make nature, usually the “ally” of love in comic tradition, into its “enemy” (p. 77). *Othello* shows us “the dark side of comedy’s rejection of singleness, its insistence on completing oneself with another” (pp. 82-83).

King Lear emerges in this book as Shakespeare’s “most radical” experiment in the uses of comedy: the dramatist “sets comic order side by side with comic chaos, and out of the dislocation . . . develops a special, devastating tragic effect” (p. 137). Observing that the play “is full of the structures, motifs, and devices of comedy” (p. 140), that it resembles comedy more than the other great tragedies “in the way it suspends the urgencies of plot” (p. 143), Snyder investigates the element of the grotesque in its shaping, the way in which Shakespeare evokes comic and tragic perceptions of events simultaneously rather than sequentially or in alternation. Gloucester’s attempted suicide, for instance, combines an emotional crisis of painful intensity with a pratfall. The cruel ending with its “shocking joke” of Cordelia’s death marries profound skepticism to a kind of exaltation. Although this bleak ending deliberately violates the rhythms of “divine comedy” (p. 168) that have been felt earlier in the drama, it also

tests and reinforces our sense of human heroism, affirming man's "capacity to create a larger self even out of the destructive element—to make his own meaning" (p. 179).

Obviously *Hamlet* cries out for such analysis. Of course, in this play more than in the other tragedies, the comic element has already received considerable attention, but Snyder's treatment, without slighting the work of others, is predictably resourceful. The role-playing of the Danish prince and his astonishing awareness, so clearly superior in most respects to that of the characters who environ him, suggest the wit, the manipulator, the ironic commentator of comedy. Yet these qualities, far from offering "the liberation promised" by that form, bring only "frustration" instead. The play "transmutes the comic celebration of multiplicity into an existential nightmare of competing perceptions of reality," and "this complete inversion of comic values" (p. 91) gives the tragedy a special kind of coherence. The hero's agonizing multiplicity of perspectives can be seen most clearly in his "O what a rogue and peasant slave" soliloquy. Here the prince halts between emotional certainty of the Ghost's validity (with its accompanying assurance of the rectitude of vengeance) and inhibiting doubt. Thus he is "a man caught between subjective surety and his own awareness that it *is* subjective." His problem is epistemological: Hamlet is "both inside his emotional conviction and outside it looking on." And so long as Hamlet's "two apprehensions remain separate and opposed" (p. 93), reasonable action is impossible for him. His "peculiar tragedy" is "to be flexible where flexibility is a drawback, to see beyond his own convictions . . ." (p. 94).

Of course "comic" characters such as Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the gravediggers, and Osric are drawn naturally into the discussion, but Snyder goes well beyond the surface and laughter-provoking features of the play. She points out, for instance, how the foil characters to Hamlet each reflect his problems of choice and therefore contribute tragic tension to that sense of "the multiple possibilities dear to comedy" (p. 98). By taking action as avengers of their father's deaths, Fortinbras and Laertes act out the subjective side of Hamlet's passion and so demonstrate the insufficiency of this unthinking approach, whereas Horatio, who does nothing, embodies for Hamlet the equal futility of his objective, ruminative posture. In combination all three figures mirror the predicament of limited choice in a world where decision seems both imperative and impossible. Hamlet's response to the Ghost catches him up in a similar dilemma. Thus Shakespeare raises questions in the tragedy "in such a way as to forestall any easy resolution, going to some pains to nurture rather than dispel ambiguity" (p. 104). And always the audience

must participate in this characteristic experience of irresolution and uncertainty: Did Claudius really murder his brother? Is the prince's grief for his father natural or excessive? How guilty is the queen? The play fails to satisfy us on the first point until it is half over—after the Mousetrap has done its work—and it never answers the second and third questions with finality.

As a tragic hero Hamlet curiously unites two roles that are characteristically opposed in comedy—that of the *eiron*, superior in knowledge to those whom he manipulates, and that of the *alazon*, the victim of the other's comic strategy. Applying these terms (taken from F.M. Cornford's *The Origin of Attic Comedy*), Snyder suggests that Hamlet, especially in his role as a mad man, is partly a victim of his own self-consciousness:

To choose and actualize only one potential is to deny wholeness. But not to choose and actualize threatens sanity itself. . . . [The] straightforward mirth [which Dr. Johnson remarked in Hamlet's antic disposition] requires that the audience be certain that Hamlet's madness is entirely pretended; but this certainty, like so many others, the play denies us. Hamlet is a trapped eiron. Insofar as the antic disposition is a role he can consciously put on and off, it offers an escape of sorts from the constrictions that press in so heavily on him. Like the comic disguise, it allows a certain freedom—in this case the freedom of the fool who cannot be held accountable for his jibes at the mighty. . . . On several occasions Hamlet's mad pose [as in Rosalind's portrayal of Ganymede] seems to acquire a life of its own, pushing him into extravagant railing irrelevant to his auditor. . . . But madness cannot fill out and complete a personality the way Ganymede completes Rosalind. Unworkable, through its lack of structure, as an alternate self, the antic disposition instead points to the ultimate in conflicting, unresolved possibilities. "Man's mind breaks down . . ." [in the very abundance of its own potentialities]. (pp. 116-117)

Snyder has fresh things to say about almost every major episode of the play as well as some minor ones. She interprets the reintroduction of the Ghost in the cellerage after his exit from the main stage (the business "is very slenderly motivated in terms of plot") as a means of dramatizing Hamlet's instinctive attempt to back off from "the commitment he has just made," the "comic nicknames" evidencing his need "to put distance between himself and that 'hic et ubique' presence" (p. 118). Hamlet's rash killing of Polonius and his paralyzed refusal to kill Claudius at prayer symbolize the two halves of the prince's divided psyche. Then the unforeseen circumstances of Act IV, a surprising "break between cause and

result . . . akin to the inevitability of comedy," intervene to suggest "a kind of cosmic irrelevance that interferes with expected patterns" (p. 121).

Hamlet's quest for the form and meaning of experience lead him on his return from England to begin thinking of his new situation in terms of providence, of "a divinity that shapes our ends": "He has found an objective truth outside himself, a pattern not subject to his distortion; with which the subjective element cooperates, knowingly or not." Snyder doubts that the "Christian resonance" of this new attitude is "meant to evoke Christian values full force" (p. 124). The graveyard scene with its stress on Death's reducing of all difference to sameness emphasizes the absence of choice, and calls in question the significance of life itself. Nevertheless, the multiple deaths at the end of the play "are handled so as to suggest order rather than senseless carnage," each defining "the life it ends in some significant way" (p. 130). Hamlet's own death, however, leaves the full complexity of his inner life unexplained, and the play therefore leaves us, as it leaves its hero, with the mysterious question, "What is real?"

Summing up, then, Snyder concludes that "Shakespeare projects a special kind of tragic disillusion in *Hamlet* by bringing into play an extraordinary amount of comic machinery only to subvert it." But here, as is not the case in *Romeo and Juliet*,

the comic devices of manipulation—the deceptions, masks, espials, diversions, plots, and play-acting of Hamlet himself and of Claudius and Polonius—beg basic questions about human power and benevolence. All three characters fail as manipulators because they are *not* above human passion and blindness and because, often concealed behind the apparently erratic relation between purpose and result, a slow process is working out the poison of Denmark according to its own inexorable rules. However satisfying in some ways is Hamlet's final submission to the dimly perceived larger order, there is nonetheless an accompanying sense of human impotence. *Hamlet* is like Shakespeare's other plays of this period . . . in its pessimism about man's ability to alter events by his mind and will. (p. 133)

Hamlet thus becomes in Snyder's view Shakespeare's quintessentially existential hero: "So comprehensive is [his] consciousness of plural meanings that it finally takes in even the absence of meaning," for the graveyard teaches him that comically irrelevant persons such as Polonius and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not merely representative of the world he rejects but part of the same clay of which he is himself compounded. Hamlet commands our sympathy and respect because "he can see the joke very

clearly . . . and still in the face of absurdity assert the meaning of his own life, as lover, friend, son of the royal line" (pp. 135-136).

It would be difficult to overpraise this book. Snyder may occasionally distort or exaggerate the comic elements in the plays she treats, and sometimes indeed she seems to raise her comic umbrella over so much of the action that tragedy is left with very few conventions of its own. Manipulators, intriguers, and eirons are perhaps no less native to Renaissance tragedy than to comedy, as even a rapid survey of the dramas—particularly those that go in for revenge—from Kyd and Marlowe to Shirley would bear out. If *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* are founded upon a "comic matrix," could we not say the same of *The White Devil* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*? Friar Laurence may be tenuously connected to the stereotype of the comic agent in romance plots, but *within* the play no one regards him with irony or as less than serious in word and action. And the statement that Polonius possesses "complete consistency as a comic character" (p. 109) appears to overlook the fact that a very shrewd king has chosen him as chief advisor and that his death brings consequences that are anything but comic—Hamlet's exile, Ophelia's madness and drowning, Laertes' armed rebellion, even, in a sense, the struggle at the grave and the final duel. Some readers inevitably will object to the deep pessimism that almost everywhere informs Snyder's assessment of Shakespeare's tragic—she comes close to the term "absurdist"—universe. But these are cavils only. Even if one should quarrel with the breadth of certain definitions, she is able to make them yield up such valuable perceptions that one can scarcely repine. *The Comic Matrix* is a bravura performance notable for qualities that rarely come together in a single work of academic criticism—power of intellect, sinuous and often subtle reasoning, cleverness, restraint, mature judgement, a passionate belief in the value of drama, and a prose style that fuses precision with grace. Shakespeareans of every kidney have cause to be grateful.

CHARLES R. FORKER

'Hamlet': Another Interpretation. By ROBERT MARKS. Mahanoy City: Raven Publishing Co., 1980. Pp. 128.

The Ghosts of 'Hamlet': The Play and Modern Writers. By MARTIN SCOFIELD. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1980. Pp. 202. Index.

One of the perennial questions in literary criticism to which no final answer can be given is, how far back into the lives of the characters is it legitimate for the reader to speculate his way? Marks's book is a continuous essay without chapters or divisions, in the nature of a running commentary on the play. This is not a drawback, though had the book been divided into chapters, the organization might have been tighter and repetition avoided. There are no footnotes and hardly any references to other books on *Hamlet*. With a work subjected to the kind of scrutiny *Hamlet* has had to endure through the centuries, such a pristine approach has its advantages—after all, if an author were to take cognizance of every critical comment made on the points he deals with, there would have to be a footnote number at the end of each sentence.

Marks's critical method, as he himself states it at the outset, dispenses with the need to be aware of the views of others who have thought about the play: "Shakespeare requires to be imaginatively interpreted: he's himself the artist of supremely fine imagination and he solicits us to exercise the quality of our own speculative imagination, as dramatic structure should. The reader is invited to involve himself and share in the composition, if he will, by performing pieces of agreeable mental effort" (p. 12). L.C. Knights's caveat in "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" was a timely corrective to such an approach o'erstepping the modesty of valid criticism, though, if adhered to scrupulously, might tend to stifle a great deal of reader/spectator participation—possibly the element that we consider "interesting" in a work of art. Perhaps it can be said that good criticism is very much like Hamlet's advice to the players: "Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus," followed by "Be not too tame neither."

Marks's book, one feels, fails to steer so precise a course; rather, it swings from one position to another, sometimes so abruptly as to make the reader dizzy with the sheer ingenuity and audacity of his conclusions. The "tame" part is the running commentary on the play's action which constitutes the bulk of the book. We don't need to be told, for example, that Hamlet's aim in staging *The Murder of Gonzago* was "merely to rattle the accursed King's suave composure, pierce his insufferable bearing of sweet reasonableness and cloying cordiality" (p. 67). But when Marks saws the air with his hand he reaches conclusions that some might dismiss as but wild and whirling words, while others might be arrested if not con-

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vinced, by his theory and be led to re-read the play in the light of it. And if a book succeeds in making us do this, surely the book has served its purpose.

Marks's theory, in brief, is Ernest Jones and Lawrence Olivier raised to the nth degree: "As a magnet draws iron, Gertrude attracts and holds her son" (p. 92). Making this the basis of his argument, Marks explains Hamlet's compliance with her request that he desist from going to Wittenberg, his affair with Ophelia (to make Gertrude jealous), his delay in killing the King (he's reluctant to make his mother miserable), and his return to Elsinore after the pirates episode (he can't bear to be parted from her). And here we come to the crux of his argument: Hamlet had confided in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern his fear of the King's designs on his life; the three friends then together unsealed the commission and read the contents; R and G were shocked and immediately permitted Hamlet to escape, but before doing so Hamlet secretly re-wrote the commission sending his loyal friends to their death in England, returned to Elsinore and told Claudius that *they* had in fact conspired to instigate the English King into rebelling against Denmark, then overthrow Claudius, and place him (Hamlet) on the throne. "This is subtly deducible, as imaginative reconstruction, from data given" (p. 104), Marks informs us. The reason for this treachery of Hamlet's was that he wanted to curry favour with Claudius in order to disarm him, and then strike at him when he was off his guard.

In order to justify his line of reasoning, Marks makes much of Hamlet's early friendship with R and G as reported by Gertrude, but shuts his eyes to his disillusionment with, and exposure of, them in II, ii, where it becomes quite clear that they are no longer his "buddies." Their role in escorting Hamlet to England, it is clear, is that of gentlemen-guards, and though they remain polite to the Prince, he is unmistakably their prisoner. Marks's Hamlet in this episode displays "sordid behavior"; his "vile chicanery, so far out of his previous forthright character, reaches this crescendo without revulsion. He's untrue to himself and false to others" (p. 107).

Though most readers will be shocked at Marks's imaginative reconstruction of events that show up Hamlet as a coldblooded murderer, in other contexts he has insights that illuminate: Ophelia "returns the presents of a happier time. The aphoristic couplet ["Take these again; for to the noble mind/Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind"] is her father's. She repeats it in Polonius's manner to let Hamlet know these aren't her own sentiments. With 'There, my lord' one suspects her to intimate where the eavesdroppers hide" (p. 57); "He goes to Ophelia and inquires 'Lady, shall I lie in your lap?' A small child's desire. . . . He reclines his head in her lap for the sole purpose of rousing his mother's jealousy" (p. 66); during Ophelia's burial "Laertes is availing himself of his sister's corpse

to parade his grievance, hoping to oust the deranged Prince and replace him. . . . His maudlin sentiment is bogus; he cares more for his political prospects than for his dead sister" (pp. 95-6); "Claudius jumps up and calls a sharp warning, 'Gertrude, do not drink!' . . . Had Claudius's expostulation been 'Gertrude, do not drink: the liquor's poisoned' he knows the chill this would produce upon everyone. He must make a spot decision and chooses not to pay the heavy price of confessing: loving himself more than his wife he lets the instant pass in which she could be saved" (p. 116).

The above examples are evidence of Marks's ability to give us insights that are both refreshing and useful. Though his overall thesis must make the judicious grieve, along the way he strews the path with observations that enrich our understanding of the layers of meaning that lie beneath the play's surface.

Unlike Marks's approach which is avowedly impressionistic, Scofield's *The Ghosts of 'Hamlet'* is a scholarly contribution to the endless fascination that the play exerts. The title refers to the elusive quality of the play's meaning, "and it is this indeterminacy, combined with such rich human suggestiveness, that has caused the ghosts of the play to reappear so often in the pages of modern literature, as if in search of the interpretation and definition which the play itself does not provide" (p. 186). The book explores the ways in which nine modern writers—Mallarmé, Claudel, Valéry, Laforgue, Eliot, Joyce, Lawrence, Kierkegaard, and Kafka—have seen themselves reflected in *Hamlet*. But this review will limit itself to a consideration of two of these authors: Kafka and Eliot.

Though Scofield's description of these reflections is always well informed, there is, inevitably, some unevenness in his treatment of them. Thus, whereas his chapter on Kafka is brilliant, that on Kierkegaard seemed, to this reviewer at least, laboured. Perhaps Scofield is not to blame for this. Kierkegaard wrote no novels as Kafka did, and though there are several allusions to *Hamlet* in his works, including a whole essay on the play ("A Side Glance at Shakespeare's *Hamlet*" in *Stages on Life's Way*), the links between Kierkegaard and *Hamlet* are more of a theoretical nature, lacking the richness and excitement of artistic transformation in Kafka that Scofield discusses with such penetrating insight.

Kafka mentions *Hamlet* only once, in a diary entry for 29 September 1915: "How could Fortinbras say that *Hamlet* had prov'd most royally?" Scofield places this brief and enigmatic question, along with the context in which it occurs, under his magnifying glass and so cogent, so astute, is his analysis of the passage that one's initial scepticism of such an

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investigation yielding fruitful results is quickly banished and one goes on to read the chapter with an ever deepening conviction of the truth of Scofield's sensitive perceptions. Kafka, in the passage from his diary, writes of "all sorts of vague resolves," of having "slept badly," of "many dreams," of his lack of success in trying to "act such a role," and concludes with the question quoted above. Scofield shows that each of these statements is a part of the mosaic constituting Kafka's (and Hamlet's) psychological and spiritual dilemma. Beginning with the opening lines of *Hamlet* in which Francisco's "challenge is thrown back at him," Scofield goes on to demonstrate how time and again in Kafka's world, as in *Hamlet*, the accepted order of things is distorted and a new pattern superimposed.

The basic resemblances between Kafka and Hamlet are, according to Scofield, "the sense of guilt connected with sex, and Kafka's relation with his father." The experience of sexuality in Kafka's short stories and novels, often bestial and frantic, Scofield links up with Kafka's resentment toward his father for his coarsely worded advice to him on matters relating to sex, commented upon in his *Letter to His Father*. "With Kafka" Scofield argues, "there is a close relation in *Hamlet* between the ambiguous sense of the father and the sexual disgust." The ambiguity of Kafka's relationship with his father, a love-hate relationship if ever there was one, finds parallels in Hamlet's collocation of his "dearest foe" in heaven and his father. This oedipal subject is the theme of another recent book, Avi Erlich's *Hamlet's Absent Father* (rev. *HSt*, vol. 1, no. 1) in which Hamlet's psychological complexities are ascribed to Shakespeare himself.

Bringing the same sensitivity to bear upon his treatment of the remaining seven authors, Scofield shows how their involvement with *Hamlet* is a window that opens upon their essences as writers. Thus Eliot's engagement with *Hamlet* from "Prufrock" to "Little Gidding" is a picture, in miniature, of Eliot's own progression as artist. Beginning with the question "What did Prufrock think Hamlet was?", Scofield goes on to show with subtlety and wit that Hamlet was, for Eliot in 1911, "a particularly interesting romantic hero because his heroism seems to tend towards something very different, a Prufrockian lack of belief in himself." Hamlet is for Eliot "an aptly ambiguous symbol of that romanticism."

In 'influence study' the danger is of reading too much into apparent echoes. But Scofield is too judicious a critic to get ensnared in this trap. Nor is he always an admirer of the usages to which modern writers have put *Hamlet*. Of Eliot's "Good night, ladies, good night sweet ladies"

Scofield observes, "The effect does not for some reason seem to be as telling as many of the other effects in the poem. The irony is perhaps too easy . . . and suggested simply by the association of the words rather than any deeper similarity or contrast."

After glancing at some other echoes in *The Waste Land*, *Gerontion*, *Ash Wednesday*, and *The Family Reunion*, Scofield finally examines the identity and the message of the "familiar compound ghost" of "Little Gidding" which is "on the blowing of the horn" even as the Ghost in *Hamlet* "faded . . . on the crowing of the cock." But Scofield, as we might expect by now, refuses to settle for a simplistic reflection of Shakespeare's ghost in Eliot's poem. Eliot's ghost "transforms the echo from something ominous to something strengthening. . . . Its leaving is dignified and far from guilty, and the sound of the horn also suggests a kind of waking up from a dream, to a newly clarified vision." This is well said; and as a comment on Eliot's own development this insight affords the reader a clue to the kind of serene equilibrium Eliot achieves in his later poetry.

The second half of Scofield's book entitled "Perception, Authority, and Identity: A Reading of *Hamlet*" is a phenomenological analysis of the play itself. In this section the author brings within a narrow compass the multitudinous complexity of possible interpretations that the play contains and that have teased out of thought generations of readers. "Waldock was right," Scofield points out, "to draw attention to the fact that critics have drifted away from large areas of what is given in the play and filled up gaps with their own inventions. But the play itself almost invites us to do this: it is a kind of puzzle designed to exercise our perception." Though in this section Scofield is not offering us a new interpretation of the play, he shows us with a remarkable economy of language that the play "is about the problems of interpretation: that in every respect it makes us aware of the vagaries of perception, the possibilities of different perspectives in the way the characters view events and each other, and in turn in the way we view those characters and events. Neither *Hamlet* nor we discover any one 'right' perspective. It is, in this sense, a tragedy of perspective."

Scofield's book, in fact, provides one powerful reason—amongst many—for the existence of a journal like *Hamlet Studies* which is devoted to a single literary text. Each age, each century, finds itself compelled to wrestle with the play. In some sense, each of the writers Scofield discusses has come to terms with the play. "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

R.W. DESAI

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